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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education

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TELLING TALES OUT OF SCHOOL: PRINCIPALS' NARRATIVES OF
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL LITERACY AND THE
HOME LITERACY PRACTICES OF A MINORITIZED CULTURE

(Monograph)

by

Wendy Ann Crocker

Graduate Program in Educational Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Much of the literature in the area of school leadership pertains to the role of the principal in school improvement – specifically in raising reading and writing scores in large-scale assessments. However, what is less represented is how administrators who are confronted daily with the socially constructed and multiple representations of *literacies* demonstrated by the English Language Learners in their schools view the focus on reading and writing referred to in the literature as *school literacy*. This Narrative Inquiry explores administrators' perspectives of the relationship between school-literacy and home-literacy practices of a minoritized culture taking as its case the Low German-speaking Mennonites (LGM) who reside in particular rural areas of southwestern Ontario and often migrate between Ontario and northern Mexico.

A Principal Learning Team (PLT) was employed in this study which brought together ten participants from six schools within one school board to share their narratives of reading and writing in school, working with LGM students and their families, and school leadership. The four main findings for discussion included: (i) recognition of a mismatch between the multiliteracies demonstrated by students and the print-literacy model perpetuated by Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) ; (ii) the use of the Low German language as a vehicle to build trust with the LGM community; (iii) recognition by the principals that *cultural proficiency* within school communities is critical when working with students from a minoritized group; and (iv) the ways in which existing leadership frameworks and checklists constrain principals' literacy leadership vis-à-vis minoritized cultures.

The study recommends that school leaders as literacy leaders adopt a widened view of literacies to encompass both the print literacy of large scale assessments such as EQAO and the daily demonstrations of multiliteracies by the students of minoritized cultures. Further, administrators should be granted greater autonomy by local boards to support school-based resource decisions. Finally, to better reflect the literacies of the students in their schools and to more appropriately assess students from minoritized cultures on large scale assessments, principals require greater latitude to employ accommodation and exemption mechanisms within the EQAO assessment.

Keywords

Print literacy, multiliteracies, EQAO, school leadership, Low German-speaking Mennonites, minoritized culture

Dedication

Live life, then, with a due sense of responsibility, not as men who do not know the meaning and purpose of life, but as those who do. – Ephesians 5:15

„Fi dee Scheela waut mie fon ea LÄwen jilieeht han in mie duatoo bijeistat han disse Oabeit ti doohn. Ejk sen jünt en deehl Dank schuldich.“

This study is dedicated to the Low German-speaking Mennonite students and their families whose lives and literacies inspired me to take on this work.

Acknowledgments

“I am going to do my doctorate.” Surprisingly, no one in my family or in my circle of friends was surprised by my declaration. However, I do not think that they realized the magnitude of the journey on which that simple declaration of intent would take us. Together, we have travelled through illness and health; through tears of frustration and joy; across miles of travel and over mountains of paper; into the “waiting place” and back out again; and finally across the stage in Alumni Hall. The dream has been realized but the journey was priceless. You know who you are, and to each of you my heartfelt thank you.

Every great journey requires sponsorship. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Faculty of Education Graduate Thesis Awards, the Phi Delta Kappa Larry Frase Fellowship, the Ontario Graduate Scholarship and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their generous funding of this research.

There are some particular travelers to whom I owe special acknowledgement for their companionship on this journey:

The Principals: Without your candor and courage this study would not exist. I challenge you to continue to push the boundaries as you carry on with this important literacy leadership work.

The Heydon’s Scholars, Literacy Research Discussion Group (Lancaster, England), and IWSG: Thank you for helping me to grow from a “teller of stories” to a “writer of stories” and believing that my narratives are worth recounting and researching.

My “critical friends” Dr. Anne Watson, Dr. Zheng Zhang, and almost-Drs. Xiaoxiao Du, and Adrienne Sauder: You continue to inspire me with your scholarship, your wisdom and your caring.

My committee: Like teachers who patiently support a child who continually struggles with putting on her *own* boots, even when they are obviously on the wrong feet, you let me find my way. You trusted my “heart map”, but you held the compass to ensure that I was always moving toward the destination even when it wasn’t in sight. Your patience and support were like a drink of water on those days when I felt like I couldn’t keep going.

My parents: You were my models for school leadership, and many of the pathways that you blazed are being followed to this day. Dad, in your own inestimable way you ensured that I had all that I needed to complete this journey to be your “doctor in the family”. Mom, you dared me to be different and you have listened endlessly to my quandaries about schoolchildren and “doing the right thing”. I cannot adequately express my love for each of you and my gratitude for your unwavering belief in me.

My husband: You were dragged around to countless libraries; Mennonite auctions; schools; churches; as well as to universities in several parts of the world. On this journey, you were my sherpa, my trusted companion dealing with all of the “details” to ensure that I could reach my goal. You listened, believed, and supported me when I thought I couldn’t continue. I could not be who I am without you.

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Preface

I was introduced to Low German-speaking Mennonites (LGM)¹ on my very first day as a newly minted vice-principal. On that first day, as the buses pulled into the school parking lot and disgorged themselves of excited schoolchildren, I saw blonde-haired children in dress reminiscent of *Little House on the Prairie* (Wilder, 1971), the girls in home-made print dresses and the boys in plaid shirts, denim coveralls and straw hats. They smiled shyly as they walked past me and whispered among themselves in a language that was unfamiliar to me, but that I was soon to learn was Low German. Although I had heard of this cultural group in passing from the teachers in the school and my administrative partner, I knew very little about them. I wondered how these children would “fit” when they were vastly outnumbered, at first blush, by English-speaking and more contemporary styled peers.

These children became more than merely a cultural footnote within my administrative responsibilities as vice-principal. As a half-time administrator, the remaining half of my day was spent within the classrooms with teachers as a “Literacy” teacher. My role was described by the school board as working in classrooms in collaboration with the classroom teacher to introduce and reinforce literacy “best practices”. It is important to note here that the “best practices” terminology of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) reflects the adoption by elementary teachers of mandated literacy strategies closely associated with improved reading and writing scores on the EQAO assessment. The strategies were most often those that had been associated with “Turn-Around schools”, so named because the use of these

¹ For the purposes of this research, Low German-speaking Mennonite (LGM) refers to Old Colony Mennonites who speak Low German or *Plautdietsch* as a first language and often migrate between areas in southwestern Ontario and their colonies in Mexico.

“best practice” strategies was connected to an increase in the students’ print literacy skills as reflected in their improved EQAO scores at Grades 3 and 6, thereby turning around a school’s rather lackluster performance. While I was expected to introduce and reinforce the LNS “best practice” strategies in the classrooms, in reality my job as “Literacy” teacher really boiled down to working with small groups during guided reading time while the classroom teacher worked with another group and the rest of the class plodded along independently at centres. In every primary class I worked with the lowest reading group according to “the DRA” (Developmental Reading Assessment) (i.e., Pearson publishing’s product to “evaluate each student’s reading ability”). Inevitably it seemed the group was comprised of LGM and my task was to teach vocabulary and reinforce the sound/symbol relationship of English. As both Literacy teacher AND administrator it felt as if I had a personal stake in how the children from the school performed on the annual primary and junior provincial assessments known as EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office). Those scores now held incredible significance for me not only as a principal who had to answer to the system if the students fared poorly, but also as a teacher who knew the LGM faces in the classrooms represented by the anonymous barcodes that had been assigned to each student by the EQAO. These children possessed cultural histories and experiences with which they came to school each day that evidently differed from their peers – but how were they different?

How did we, my colleagues and I as administrators, view the out-of- school literacies of these students? Were we even cognizant of what they were, and could we recognize them in practice in a school setting? How did the world of home literacies and the world of school literacies relate to each other? Were other principals struggling with these same issues and concerns? Until I could find time to read and research how the literacies of children from

minority cultures were viewed in schools, how I could connect and relate information about LGMs to how I worked with that cultural group in the school? How could I rethink and rebuild the literacy program at the school? I simply continued to muddle through doing the best that I could using as my yardstick, “Treat others as you would like to be treated.” This mantra served me well in dealing with the faith-based aspects of the LGM students and their families. However, it did not assist me in addressing or supporting their acquisition of English literacy skills. I felt that only if I had time to read, to learn, and then to incorporate what I had discovered could I build a school community that supported LGM students and their families. By sharing with my colleagues what I had learned, I felt I could make a difference in how other principals viewed what the LGM children were demonstrating about literacy every day in their schools.

Serious illness required me to step back from the leadership of my school for an extended period but offered precious time to investigate my questions of principals’ perceptions of the relationship between school literacy and home literacy practices related to LGM students. This dissertation is the product of that exploration.

1. Chapter One

“When the proximity of cultural and linguistic diversity is one of the key facts of our time, the very nature of language learning has changed.”

(New London Group, 1996, p. 64)

1.1 Introduction

This research came about as a result of three inter-connected concerns: first, the tension I experienced in my role as an elementary principal between leading a school community in an area of rural southwestern Ontario school with a concentration of Low German-speaking students and addressing local literacy mandates; second, an attempt to rationalize my observations of and beliefs about the array of literacies with which I was confronted daily; and finally, the recognition that a study of this kind could contribute to the research related to the relationship between dominant school literacy and the literacies of minoritized cultures. The need for further research--to address a scarcity of research and resources addressing LGM students in public schools--became evident when I attempted to find *something* to support the work of classroom teachers when it came to literacies. While a plethora of supports was available to “bump up” reading and writing skills (Hine & Malka, 2008), my search at the libraries of both the neighbouring faith-based university and the education faculty at Western turned up little pertaining to the literacy practices of LGM children. That which I did discover was of limited use in a public school setting and focused on the justification for Mennonite education (e.g. Hertzler, 1971), and discussions of faith-based education, and the rationale for the offering of specific subjects (Kraybill, 1977), or provided a cultural overview written and sanctioned by those inside the Old Order culture (Martin, 1923) or, alternately, by those who were outside the colony and therefore were not recognized by the Old Colony

Mennonites as authoritative (Redekop, 1989; Quiring, 2003). Any reference to working with Mennonite students in the public school classroom originated in a neighbouring board of education and addressed another group, (i.e., Old Order Mennonites; Gingrich, nd), whose beliefs were significantly different from the Old Colony Mennonites with whom I worked. Armed with the understanding that the areas of school literacy and home literacies of the Low German-speaking Mennonites were under-represented in the literature and in available classroom resources I was spurred on to take action. I realized that a systematic study of this dilemma was needed using methods that were more intentional than simply arranging “coffee conversations” with other principals to learn from their experiences in working with the LGM community. What was needed was a research study with a goal to learn about the relationship between school literacy (as reading and writing in English) and home literacies of the LGM based on the stories of Ontario school principals who had worked with this cultural group. I chose to focus my narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) on the phenomenon that takes place at the “interface” (Levinson, 2007) of home and school meeting in the public school. Further, I employ the term “minoritized” from the work of McCarty (2002) who coined the term to explain the power relations and processes by which certain groups are marginalized within the larger society. Certainly this descriptor fits the LGM cultural group who choose to live as the quiet in the land, and adhere to strict interpretations of the Lutheran Bible.

In keeping with my own ontological and epistemological perspectives as a social constructivist, my research questions have emerged from my experiences as an elementary school principal in a school with a concentrated population of LGM students,

within the context of literacy in Ontario schools as described by the government policies and literature, and finally to the world of the LGM children and their broad experiences of language and literacies across several contexts and countries.

I ask:

1. What can the principals' stories teach educators about the relationship between school literacy and the literacies of children who are minoritized?
2. What have principals learned about literacy teaching and learning from LGM children and their families?
3. What have principals done in the school environment to support the school literacy development of primary children who are minoritized?
4. What influences how a principal leads a school community (e.g. definitions of literacy)?
5. What are the implications for principals as literacy and curriculum leaders?

I now turn to describing the research interface at which this study takes place in more detail.

1.2 The research interface

The three adjoining areas of this research—the literacies of LGM students, the Ontario school system with its focus on school literacy, and the role of the school administrator in leading a school community that is situated in both of these worlds—overlap within the public school where tensions are played out and negotiated by both the LGM children and the school administrators. What would seem to be a case study of the integration (assimilation) of LGM children into the dominant culture of the Ontario public school environment vis-à-vis language is meant instead to be a layered, narrative inquiry of the relationship between school literacy and the home literacy practices of a minoritized culture (LGM) as viewed by school leaders. In order to better understand the

setting for this inquiry, it is imperative to be familiar with some of the background of each context, beginning with the closed world of the Low German-speaking Mennonites.

1.2.1 Low German-speaking Mennonites (LGM)

LGM live in communities throughout rural southwestern Ontario. Within rural southwestern Ontario there are several areas of settlement of first- and second-generation Mennonite families (see Plate 1). While it is impossible to generalize across a diverse culture, those who identify themselves as Mennonite either by faith, church, culture or tradition outnumber those of the dominant culture in some areas. Nevertheless, the LGM represent a minoritized culture and for the purpose of this study are those groups who are identified by their use of Low German as a first language and a recognizable code of dress. LGM encompass but are not limited to groups such as the Old Colony, Rhineland, and Sommerfelder Mennonites. Many are from homes where Low German is the first language—a spoken patois that is rarely written or read (Epp, 1999). LGM are the minoritized culture in this study and their children its focus.



Plate 1: Mennonite settlement in Southwestern Ontario [used with permission]

This study uses literacy as its entry point into research with this cultural group specifically examining the school literacies of the Low German-speaking Mennonites. The first language of the LGM community is Low German (Plautdietsch), “a 500 year old dialect that is the mother-tongue of 300,000 Mennonites and the ancestral language of many more” (McCaffery, 2008, p.5). There is an oral history, not the print literacy histories (i.e., reading and writing; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004) of the dominant culture. However, there are challenges within the culture to preserve this oral tradition.

Plautdietsch is very dialectic and differs according to geography. The dialect learned by children in Mexico or Belize, for example, can be distinguished from that learned in Manitoba or Russia. While dialectic differences may make it difficult to have a fluent conversation, it becomes even more challenging when trying to capture Low German in written form. Many of the members of the LGM community haven't seen the language that they routinely speak as a written text. Among the Low German-speaking Mennonites in Ontario, English, Plautdietsch, and High German are used by different members of the community, for different purposes, at different times. Because LGM families have roots in Mexico or other parts of Latin America, and because many continue to travel back and forth, Spanish is also added to the mix of languages in use. The demands made upon LGM children who participate in at least two very different cultures and Discourse communities (Swales, 1998) are significant. For these children, acquiring literacy “is a complex business involving several languages” (Gregory & Williams, 2000, p. 167). As noted by Luke and Kale (1997), “the differences that children bring to classrooms are not simply idiosyncrasies . . . They are the products and

constructions of the complex and diverse social learning from the culture(s) where children grow, live and interact” (p.16). When LGM children arrive at public school in southwestern Ontario, many bring this plethora of literacies with them, but lack the one that is “counted” in the Ontario context: proficiency in school literacy--reading and writing in English.

1.2.2 Ontario Public Education

The climate of Ontario education in 2001, the year in which I became a school administrator, reflected a growing recognition of the importance of the relationship between the school and the school community. During this era an increased importance in the role of assessment and evaluation with an associated emphasis on accountability at all levels that was narrowly defined within a school improvement framework that included student performance on large scale provincial assessments of reading and writing was ushered in. Late in the 1990s, the Province of Ontario introduced standardized testing for all students at the Grades 3 and 6 levels (Education Quality and Accountability Office Act, 1996). The EQAO tests consisted of several days of pencil-and-paper testing of the cumulative skills expected by the Ontario curriculum with a focus on language and mathematics. The rules for participation were rigid: every child was obliged to write the test unless a legitimate reason not to could be legally shown. Students on Individual Education Plans (IEP) or those children new to Canada receiving English as a Second Language (ESL) support were exempted. Because the test was initially publicized as a tool to monitor the success of the new curriculum introduced by a Conservative government in the late 1990s (see http://www.eqao.com/pdf_e/12/PowerOntProv_TestingProg_en.PDF), the students who

were exempted were figured into the school result by counting their score as zero. Those neighbourhood schools that had large numbers of students from newcomer families or schools that served populations of children on IEPs had school-wide scores that were significantly reduced across all assessment areas. Had the test scores remained confidential for school and board use, the impact may not have been significant. However, individual school results were posted in order of rank in the local papers. Overall system scores were reported in relation to the scores of other area school boards. Now, over a decade later, even with several major changes to the format, duration, and focus of the assessments, the EQAO tests are still cause for concern for teachers and administrators. Within the context of Ontario education, it is tacitly understood by school officials that if a student is scored at a Level 3 (B) then that student is considered to have met the provincial standard which defines what it means to be “literate”.

Millions of dollars have been spent on EQAO assessment with further spending by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (Elementary Teachers of Ontario, 2010) in the form of resources, print materials, personnel to coach students in math and literacy, web sites, handouts, not to mention the staff hours spent in workshops and meetings. EQAO has become a testing industry. Raising literacy rates has become a plank in the platform of each political party in subsequent provincial elections, and the role of the principal in the school is now the “curriculum leader”, or more recently, the “literacy leader” with a focus on literacy and numeracy (Reeves, 2006; Pilkington, 2009; Speir, 2009). An entire new genre of educational professional reading began to appear on shelves during this period; all were texts dealing with school improvement, raising the bar, and “bumping it up,” and contained a nuanced sense of what it meant to be a successful principal

(Chenoweth, 2007, 2009; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). According to one text, the role of the literacy principal was to “observe improved student achievement in literacy, close the gap . . . monitor and support the learning around [us] and continually strive toward improved student success” (Booth & Rowsell, 2007, p. 137).

How, with all of this focus on increased “literacy” scores were the children from the LGM community going to fare? English represented a third or fourth language for some, and many of them had no English proficiency. LGM students were drawing on their knowledge of reading and writing several other languages, one of which was primarily oral. Yet their enrollment in the EQAO test was not predicated on whether or not they were sufficiently fluent in English to read passages and respond to questions, or to write persuasively. The determining factor was the length of time they had resided in Ontario or in Canada. This criterion did not take into account that Low German was the first language for many of these children, and continued to be the language spoken in the home and in the LGM community even if the children were born in Ontario. Canadian born children were required to take the test because education officials assumed that Ontario-born children had sufficient mastery of English by age eight to write the EQAO assessment. The inadequacy of these assumptions is demonstrated by the number of LGM children who are Canadian citizens, yet have a first language that is neither English nor French, the country’s two official languages; the policies of education weren’t in keeping with the realities of the children attending school in Ontario. A few LGM students were exempt from the testing because their English was rudimentary coupled with the fact that they had been born in Mexico, Belize or Paraguay therefore *buying* five years of English as a Second Language (ESL) support in the school system.

In Ontario, the focus on literacy, numeracy and drop-out rates became visibly linked to economics:

Ontario's economic success depends on a strong, publicly funded education system. That means investing in skills and education and helping students reach their full potential, starting as early as kindergarten. Since 2003, test scores are up, class sizes are down, and graduation rates are on the rise. (Government of Ontario Progress Report, 2011, p. 1)

Further, the Training section of the Progress Report contends that Ontario's greatest economic advantage is its people (2011, p.7). The government alignment of the success of Ontario's workforce, high school graduation, the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) and a model of literacy predominantly adopted in public schools and measured by EQAO, presents a hierarchy that privileges English competency while discounting other literacies. In my position as school leader, I felt that I was complicit in forwarding an autonomous view (Street, 1984) of literacy—that reading and writing could be reduced to teaching and mastering isolated skills that students were expected to reproduce on a large scale assessment. All the teacher “training”, release time, and documentation offered by the Ministry of Education to the local school board as support was aligned with the improvement of reading and writing scores. The OSSLT became the standard that indicated whether or not a student was “literate” by Ministry definition, could graduate from high school and take their place in higher education or in the workplace. EQAO assessment of reading and writing at Grades 3 and 6 levels were the means by which good schools were identified. According to the Progress Report, “things seemed to be working in Ontario” (2011, p.1). For schools with students from a

minoritized culture (e.g., LGM) things were not as successful as the report indicated. Not only were these children and their families working through differences in language and Discourse communities, but their experiences of school differed significantly between Ontario and Mexico.

The Ontario school system is governed by the Education Act, a piece of provincial legislation that oversees all aspects of education from the roles of students, parents, teachers, and principals to the length of the school year and attendance requirements. The Education Act prescribes that the languages of instruction in public schools will reflect one of the two national languages – English or French (i.e., www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statuetes/english/elaws-statutes-90e02e.htm#BK547). While the label of English Language Learner (ELL) afforded the child access to support in learning to speak, read, and write English, it did not recognize or account for the literacies that the child brought with him/her to school. Further, a formula was devised to allocate English as a Second Language (ESL) Support that was based on the length of time a child had resided in Canada. The ELL designation constrained children from working with their classmates and same first language peers by assigning the children to a class to work with an itinerant teacher from outside the school who was not necessarily conversant in the ways in which literacy was supported within the school, or the literacies of the LGM children. As such, the optics of “support” in the form of scheduled time with a trained ESL teacher who visited several schools over the course of one day appeared to address the need. The itinerant, withdrawal model may have made economic sense at the system level. However, the itinerant model was contradictory to an inclusive model that was being widely adopted across the province. Further, in my experience, the model was

imposed on a school community without the necessary infrastructure to support literacy learning. Thus, the school environment was often not designed through the assigning of support staff or by thoughtful timetabling to integrate the kinds of support from which LGM children as multilingual learners could benefit.

1.2.3 The school leader

The role of the elementary school principal in Ontario is “complex, fragmented, and multi-task(ed)” (Castle, Mitchell, & Gupta, 2002, p. 3). A school leader is inundated with a wide variety of expectations and influences that emanate from the local community, the local school board, the Ministry of Education and education research. In early 2001, local Ontario school systems drew heavily from existing American studies for models to emulate (see Schmoker, 1996, 1999; Dufour & Eaker, 1998). Senior administration recommended professional readings to their administrators that were produced by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) headquartered in Virginia—the largest education administrative organization in North America. Principal teams from southwestern Ontario school boards regularly visited American schools in Chicago. The development of principals as school leaders was reliant upon work related to school improvement (Schmoker, 1996, 1999; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Reeves, 2006; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Zmuda, Kuklis & Kline, 2004), on the need to improve literacy test scores (Pollock & Ford, 2009), or on how administrators could influence classroom pedagogy (Pilkington, 2009; Kohm & Nance, 2007) in addition to the necessity to create a collaborative school environment (Senge, 1990; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2004). Even the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat drew heavily from the

work of Reeves (2006) in its mandates to improve the lowest performing schools (OFIP 1). Outside of the work situated in large Ontario urban centres, little Canadian based research was provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education, the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat or school boards to support principals in addressing the needs of students who were minoritized. The work that was designated for reading in principal study groups was that of Fullan (2012), Fullan and Hargreaves (2013), and Leithwood (2012). Specifically for schools with LGM students, the “best practices” literature from other, larger cultural groups was not consistent with the needs of the LGM students because of the complex mix of challenges that the school system posed to their oral literacy tradition, their cultural traditions, and their faith-based beliefs about education.

The preponderance of literacy, language, and culturally-related research in Canada focuses almost exclusively on First Nations (e.g., Battiste, 1987, 2000; Battiste & Baker, 2010; Canadian Council on Learning, 2008). While there are strong parallels between research in this area and what has been written about the LGM including the government’s role in their positioning as minoritized, and the recognition of an oral history in both cultures, there is little work that speaks directly to the literacies of Mennonite groups. The bulk of research on LGM is either historical or theological in nature and focuses on the diaspora and the challenges of being a migrant people (Redekop, 1989; Dyck, 1993). There is a nascent repository of academic work related to LGM generally and their languages and literac(ies) in particular. What has been written is often from historical (Kleine Gemeinde; Loewen, 2001), anthropological (Redekop, 1989), linguistic (McCaffery, 2008), or faith-based (Old Order; Hertzler, 1971; Roth, 2011) perspectives. In relation to Canadian studies of literacy and school improvement,

research appears to be limited (e.g., Earl & Katz, 2006, Leithwood, Anderson & Whalstrom, 2004). The Ontario Principals' Council (OPC), the Institute for Educational Leadership and, by default, Ken Leithwood as the researcher from OISE associated with the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) work on school leadership has produced some research addressing various aspects of the principals' role and school leadership (e.g., 2012). However, many of these sources are intertwined with work from the Ontario Ministry of Education that supports administrative accountability frameworks thereby prescribing definitions and practices that could conflict with the perspectives of the school leader on literac(ies).

How school leadership styles are construed and what are considered characteristics of effective school principals vary greatly in this leadership literature (e.g., Schulte, Slate & Onwuegbuzie, 2010). However, the common theme found in all of the literature on leading a school, becoming a principal, and being effective in the role is the importance of starting off as a classroom teacher. In developing the role of principal beyond this shared beginning, the literature on principal leadership rarely refers back to the strategies of what worked in the classroom. Instead, the research is preoccupied with improving student scores and strategies for working with a school community, the most recent spotlight being on the creation of a safe school environment (e.g., Hill, 2010) for all learners. Notions of leading a culturally responsive learning community are sublimated under more hot-button topics such as bullying. Research that focuses on the role of school leaders in relation to multiliteracies and cultural proficiency in working with minoritized groups is limited in the literature. This study attempts to address this scarcity in the research and has as its goal to examine the relationship between school

literacy and the literacy practices of minoritized cultures – represented in this work by the LGM - from the point of view of the school principal. Thus, this work is both necessary and timely as school populations and the representative literacies within them become more and more diverse, while the supports for principals have not focused on this aspect of school leadership.

1.3 Dissertation organization

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. This first chapter introduces the study and the specific research questions. In Chapter Two, I survey the literature and indicate how the study will address gaps in the existing research related to school literacies and minoritized children in general and the LGM in particular. The literature is divided into several sections including: the differing ways in which the definition of literacy is taken up in the research; how school leadership is described; how professional communities of practice relate to PLTs; the portrayal of LGM culture, faith, and colony life; and finally what it means to be literate in Ontario. The theoretical underpinnings of the study draw from critical literacy, sociocultural theory, and the field of New Literacy Studies to create a comprehensive lens through which to view the questions this study attempts to address.

In Chapter Three I outline my rationale for choosing a qualitative, narrative methodology as an apt way to respond to my research questions. Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as a methodology is defined and discussed. Additionally, I introduce a figure to help illustrate the iterative process of collecting and deconstructing the study narratives in order to identify themes. In this chapter I also describe the fine line

between Insider and Outsider that I walked during this study. This positioning is described by Krebs (1999) as “edgewalking” and an “edgewalker” as someone who “develop[s] comfort with a particular ... group moving between ‘self’ and ‘other’ so as to discuss each with some clarity” (p.1).

In Chapters Four and Five I present the study according to three key themes: principals’ perspectives on school leadership; principals’ views of literacy, and principals’ understanding of the LGM.

I conclude the dissertation (Chapter Six) with a discussion of the data and the implications for literacy work with minoritized cultures. Additionally, I share the myriad of unexpected events that occurred during the course of this research and how these incidents have contributed to the resources that now exist to help educators support the literacies of LGM students in Ontario public schools. Finally, I leave the reader with four lessons about the relationship of school literacy and the literacies of children who are minoritized that the stories of the principals offer to educators.

2. Chapter Two

“Children are having more and more learning experiences outside of the school that are more important for their futures than is much of the learning that they do in school”.
(Gee, 2004, p.5)

2.1 Review of the Literature

This study has been informed by the literature related to school literacy, multiliteracies (New Literacy Studies), multilingual literacy, LGM literac(ies), and school leadership. In this chapter, I survey the research landscape related to my work, and indicate the space into which I insert this research. My study of the relationship between school literacy and home literacy practices of minoritized cultures focuses on the *meso* level (how school leaders can build literacy initiatives using multiliteracies; Cummins, 2002) as it relates to minoritized cultures in general. I utilize the case of the Low German-speaking Mennonites a population that is specific to some southwestern Ontario rural public schools and about which little research has been conducted. I focus on the literature related to school literacy, the expanded definition of *multiliteracies* and what is inherent within that multiple view of what is meant by “literacy”. In relation to minoritized cultures, I draw from the work of researchers in the Latino and African American communities in the United States to provide an understanding of multilingual literacy and of good practice at the *micro level* (how teachers take up multiliteracies in their classrooms; Cummins, 2002) in working with these populations. I turn to the literacies of the Low German Mennonites to offer the reader an understanding of the multiple ways in which this transnational group makes meaning and as an illustration of multilingual literacy. Due to the scarcity of resources related to the literacies of this ethno-religious group, what I offer is both an indication of the limited scope of existing work in the area, as well as some important background information about the literacies

of the Low German-speaking Mennonites as it relates to this research. Finally, I explore what it means to be literate in Ontario schools (i.e., *macro level*—how governments can embed multiliteracies in policy; Cummins, 2002) and how that view of literacy is reflected in the literature on school leadership including an exploration of the role of PLCs.

2.2 Literature related to school literacy and multiliteracies

A survey of the literacy landscape reveals a range of definitions of literacy. It also demonstrates a significant change in what “literacy” has meant over the last several decades. The following section describes how “reading, writing and school” have become synonymous with literacy and offers important background information for this study as well as a demonstration of the breadth of research in the area.

2.2.1 Defining literacy

In this section, I offer a brief overview of the history of reading, writing, and school—the precursors of *school literacy* that is an important element of this study. Where did the notion of school literacy originate? Within education, “literacy” has been conflated with a number of terms including reading, comprehension, decoding, sound-symbol understanding, phonics, phonemic awareness, levelled text, and independent reading level. Most recently, the term “literacy” has even been attached to new curriculum related to finances (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). Historically, the terms literacy and reading were often used interchangeably and were most concerned about writing and reading as it pertained to school. The earliest research involved the use of reading as a tool to study perception. In time, the research shifted to an examination of

reading itself but the field continued to be dominated by psychologists studying reading behaviour and reading readiness (e.g., Morphett & Washbourne, 1931; Dolch & Bloomster, 1937); their beliefs held sway up until the mid-twentieth century. Schools were heavily influenced by behaviourism, a position that viewed reading as sets of discrete skills where progress could be prescribed and controlled through systemic reinforcement (Skinner, 1957). A behaviouristic view of reading positions it as a skill to be taught in sequential steps after which the student is tested for mastery (Skinner, 1957). The earlier phonics-based texts (e.g., McGuffey readers) were considered to be stilted, the pathway to learning to read was seen to be linear, and the assumption was that everyone could learn to read if the materials were presented in the correct order and at the correct pace (Burns, 1975). Proponents of this method posited that if a child could master the alphabetic principle (matching letters to their sounds) he or she could then enjoy a wide range of texts by applying the “rules” of phonics. However, with the number of phonetic exceptions in the English language, readers were often left to memorize a number of words in spite of having sound phonic basics. Additionally, the variation of English dialects in their rules of pronunciation caused additional challenges for readers. Evidently, there was a need for a different method of teaching reading. Publishers of school text books echoed this shift in theoretical stance by creating basal readers with prescribed, high frequency word lists to teach children to read in the 1950s and 60s (e.g., Foresman, *Dick and Jane*). Using a whole word approach (look-say), the target words were used with sufficient frequency on a page so that the child could recall them. However, critiques of this method arose. It was argued that the repetitive text, limited vocabulary and simplistic word choice didn’t properly teach children how to read

(Flesch, 1955). Further, racially minoritized children could rarely see themselves in the texts. The debate between whole word reading and phonics-based programs was the beginning of the “reading wars” (for elaboration see Jager-Adams, 1984; Strickland, 1998; Walker, 2008) to which a new theory of reading was added in the late 1970s.

In contrast to the part-to-whole method of learning to read, Goodman (1976) and Smith (1971) posited that reading was more than phonics and decoding and that it should be viewed as “the direct extraction of meaning from print” (Smith as cited in Doehring & Aulls, 1979). This shift in theoretical stance coincided with the emergence of new perspectives on childhood and reading. Researchers began to observe the behaviours of children as they were reading, and what had been framed as the “skill” of reading became much more than learning sounds, symbols, and sight words. “Reading for meaning” was the mantra of the Whole Language movement and used constructivism (the belief that children build on what they already know) as its theoretical underpinning (Goodman & Goodman, 1979). Children’s trade books and classic literature were used to introduce children to reading in a whole-to-part method including seeing and using the word in context, and then breaking it down as needed (Reyhner, 2008). The Whole Language movement supported the use of the children’s own writing to create meaningful stories. However, while this approach introduced the shared reading of an enlarged piece of text to emulate the “lap-reading” of some cultures, theorists working with marginalized groups pointed out the shortcomings of a method that assumed literacy practices that failed to account for cultural differences (Delpit, 1988).

It wasn't until the 1980s that the importance of reading and writing as something beyond a school skill came into focus. Among a group of scholars including linguists, anthropologists, and sociologists:

[a] revolution was taking place that demanded a reevaluation of literacy as something that moved beyond any conventional ability to read and write. Rather than literacy development being something that began at the start of schooling after a bout of reading readiness exercises, it was becoming a much broader continuum that had its origins in very early childhood and drew its meaning from making sense rather than formal teaching. (Gillen & Hall, 2003, p. 6)

The “making sense” view of literacy according to Gillen and Hall's (2003) definition required researchers and practitioners to conceive of reading as involving much more than a condemnation of lock-step word lists and high frequency text passages. In adopting a wider view of literacy, reading was looked at through a lens that utilized books and texts from many discourse communities and in many formats as tools for teaching. The social context became a primary consideration of literacy—the “where and why” of meaning making as opposed to learning to read and write and adding the element of the social afterward (Street, nd). Literacy became tightly connected with the context in which it was used, the way in which reading and writing contributed to the task, and the communication of meaning beyond the use of pencil and paper. According to some prominent researchers:

Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set

of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analyzed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people. (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000, p. 7)

This shift in thinking about reading and writing as a skill-based, mastery perspective to a socially situated method of understanding and of being understood was posited by Street (1984) as two distinct models of literacy. He contended that to understand literacy, one must first understand the “uses and consequences” underpinning its use. His first model, the *autonomous perspective*, is framed as “assum[ing] a single direction in which literacy development can be traced, and associates it with progress, civilization, individual liberty and social mobility” and represents a “culture specific” practice (Street, 1984, p.2). Autonomous literacy is most often equated with school and the skills of reading and writing that herald school success. Street noted that those adhering to this model believe that:

Literacy in itself will – autonomously – have effects on other social and cognitive practices... and introducing literacy to poor ‘illiterate’ people... will have the effect of enhancing their cognitive skills, improving their economic prospects and making them better citizens regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their illiteracy in the first place. (Street, nd, p.2)

By disguising cultural assumptions, literacy and the texts themselves can be put forward as neutral even though they are imbued with and representative of a specific cultural perspective that doesn’t alter over time (Street & Lefstein, 2007, p. 123). An example of the autonomous perspective is embedded in the use of “prepackaged reading materials”.

25 Reading comprehension passages (Pauk, 1976) requires that a student read a passage, answer the questions, self-assess his/her responses and then, based on the success of the assessment move ahead to a more difficult passage. This example demonstrates how literacy is often viewed as neutral and detached from the social context in which it is embedded. In holding a view of literacy as autonomous and as a discrete set of skills that can be taught and mastered, the classroom pedagogy of teaching reading can be aligned with school literacy scores and the types of questions and responses expected on large scale standardized tests in Ontario. This in turn produces a statistic used to demonstrate student progress within the province. In this model, the uses and consequences of literacy are often economic—direct teaching of a narrow band of “homogenized” (Street & Lefstein, 2007) skills that can be readily measured and used to demonstrate proficiency--that are interpreted as markers of successful governance. Yet, this perspective fails to recognize and incorporate the many and varied perspectives of literacy that stem from the array of cultures in Canadian society.

Street (1984) challenges researchers in the field to view literacy as dynamic and social. His “ideological model” highlights the culturally imbued nature of reading and writing and how these literacy practices (repeated uses of reading and writing as well as the inclusion of values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships; Barton & Hamilton, 1998) become embedded in everyday lives. Street cautions that no one adheres strictly to only one model, but suggests that being aware of both perspectives as an “ideal type” (2007, p. 117) offers a broader perspective than that offered by a sole literacy theorist. It is not my intent to polarize the theorists in the field, but rather to foreground and background different phenomena and to support a “widened lens” (Purcell-Gates,

Jacobsen & Degener, 2007) in the study of literacy. Because children “see the world through the eyes provided by their culture” (Geekie, Cambourne & Fitzsimmons, 2004, p. 105), it is necessary to consider my research study as another case of utilizing a widened lens to see both school literacy as well as the home literacy practices of the minoritized culture in this study, Low German-speaking Mennonites.

Within the study, the idea of *literacy practice* is critical to recognizing and observing the literacies of a minoritized culture whose first language is other than English. According to Street (nd) a *literacy practice* refers to “the broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts” (p. 5). Barton and Hamilton (1998) build on this definition and describe a literacy practice as something that people do with literacy as a powerful way to consider the connection between the skills of reading and writing and their use in a meaningful way in the wider community. When taken up in this way, a literacy practice is not a set of skills an individual possesses, but rather exists in the relationships between people, within groups and communities (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000). In her seminal work, *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*, Heath (1983) described literacy *events* as “occasion[s] in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes” (p. 93). When taken together, literacy events and literacy practices relate to a semiotic *domain*. Gee (2001) defines a semiotic domain as the calling upon specific modalities (e.g., oral or written language, images, equations, symbols and so on) to communicate distinctive types of messages. Examples of semiotic domains include advertisements, Mennonite

theology etc. and is also aligned with “a way of being, a world view or a set of cultural beliefs” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012, p. 9).

In looking at literacy across different settings, it is evident that literacy practices are many and varied, and that literacy is not the same in each situation. This multiplicity of literacy, or *literacies* (Street, 1984), is often referred to in the discussion of literacy as multiple and socially constructed *multiliteracies* (New London Group, 1996).

2.2.2. Multiliteracies

The term multiliteracies was coined by the New London Group in 1994 in order to encapsulate the two main arguments brought forth by this collective of literacy scholars. The “pedagogy of multiliteracies” utilizes a much broader spectrum of representation than merely language by applying the concept of multimodality (i.e., oral and written language, images, equations etc.). Multimodality also includes plurality of culture and context (i.e., multilingual, multicultural) and takes into account specific cognitive, cultural, and social effects (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5). The first of the two key components of a multiliteracies perspective relates to multimodal meaning making: the use of modes (a set of resources people in a culture are given to communicate including but not limited to print, image, speech, and music) as an elaboration of the usual understanding of text as written. An expanded definition of literacy is of particular importance when considering the abundance of electronic media and technology widely in use around the globe and across social contexts (e.g., texting, computer use in schools). The second salient aspect of multiliteracies is the consideration of diversity and “global connectedness” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p.7). Multiliteracies literature calls for scholars, researchers and practitioners to widen their perspective of community and

envision themselves as citizens of the world who can interact effectively using “multiple languages, multiple Englishes, and communication patterns that more frequently cross cultural, community, and national boundaries” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 6). These two key aspects of multiliteracies are investigated in the seminal work of the New London Group, *A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures*. This study is situated in the space opened up by scholars who examine literacy in everyday life (see Street, 1984; Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Gee, 2001) known as the field of New Literacy Studies. (NLS; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p. 11). In drawing from this body of work, I pay particular attention to the multiplicity of *Discourses* (*discourse* (lowercase) as the “language in use”; *Discourse* (uppercase), when “other stuff” like culturally enacted ways of being is added; Gee, 1999) in relation to a culturally and linguistically diverse society, and how schools can work with minoritized populations. By situating literacy within a *discourse community* – a grouping of people not only face-to-face, but also ideational across time and space (Moje & Lewis, 2007)–literacy is viewed not as a technical skill that can be addressed with the “right teaching method, and strategy for pre-packaged curricula” (Purcell-Gates et al, 2004, p. 65) but as “multiple literacies” which draw from differing languages and writing systems, as well as differing social contexts or domains (Street, 1984).

2.2.3 Multilingual literacy

The notion of multilingual literacy is drawn from the work of adjacent fields of research; NLS and Bilingualism. Adjacent because some of the key elements of both theoretical positions align and complement each other including, but not limited to, the importance of literacies as multiple and socially situated, and the particularities of

literacy practices within groups (Barton as cited in Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000). Martin-Jones and Jones (2000) assert that the use of the term *multilingual* captures the “multiplicity and complexity of individual and group repertoires” (p. 158) as opposed to *bilingual* that intimates a back and forth between two individuals. Further, they contend that multilingual, in keeping with the NLS multiliteracies direction, provides the best description of the communicative repertoire of more than two spoken or written languages and focuses on the multiple ways in which people draw on and combine communicative codes when they speak and write. I take up that term in this research as it recognizes both oral and written forms of communication thereby not devaluing the oral history of minoritized cultures in general and the first language, Low German, of LGM in particular. Additionally, “multilingual” implies that there are multiple ways to acquire the spoken and written languages within the group repertoire. In the case of the LGM the use of the term “multilingual” validates their literacies across a variety of domains including: the comprehension of oral High German (church), the home language of Low German, the written language of school in Mexico (High German) but the language of instruction in that same school as Plautdietsch, the language of interaction in stores and the community in Mexico (Spanish) and in Ontario (English).

To understand the impact of taking up a multiple literacy perspective in this research, I revisit the importance of the ideological model of literacy (Street, 1984) wherein literacy practices and events are viewed through the lens of how they are being used in a social context to “make meaning” (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). By taking an event out of the sociocultural context “neither their structures nor their function can be understood” (Scribner, 1987). Literate behaviour cannot be described as a single entity

even across cultures. While the notion of “culture” is not monolithic, there are norms and expectations across societies that describe the texts in use for that group. Because cultures differ both in what they consider as texts and in the importance that they attach to them (Blackledge, 2000), each culture views literate behaviour differently. In seeking to understand the literacy practices of minoritized groups, it is therefore important to identify not only the event, but also the social and cultural value attached. Within schools, this poses a significant challenge because what is valued as print literacy (i.e., interactions for a communicative purpose involving some form of reading and writing; Purcell-Gates et al., 2004), academic literacy (i.e., a set of academic competencies that lead to academic success; Newman, 2002), and official literacy (i.e., the types of textual practices expected by school/government; Dyson, 1993) are determined by the dominant culture of the school (Blackledge, 2000). As a result, the literacies of minority-culture families are not recognized or supported. Within classroom practices, the relative positioning of the different cultural understandings of literacy in relation to the dominant literacy often reflects coercive relations of power (Cummins, 1996) and serves to maintain the division of resources and status (i.e., the societal power structure). Instead of building with others in a collaborative relationship (Cummins, 1996, p. 15), coercive relations invoke a discourse of pathology and a mentality of blaming the victim (Ryan, 1972) that attributes school failure to perceived intrinsic characteristics of the cultural group (e.g., being unmotivated, parental apathy). Within the literature on school and classroom literacy, however, there are researchers who discuss successful classroom practices with children and families from minoritized cultures, and it is to this work I turn.

2.2.4 Successful literacy practices with learners from minoritized cultures

The literature indicates that researchers and teachers are introducing considerations of sociocultural contexts to the study of literacy. This has important classroom implications including valuing and honouring the knowledge of parents and translating the home literacy practice(s) into the school (Edwards & Nwemely, 2000). It also has an impact on what “counts” as reading within a classroom (Gregory, 2008, p. 23). Gregory asserts that the parent or caregiver, by virtue of his/her role as mediator of the home language and culture, and the child as the mediator of the school language and culture, can each be “expert” for the other (p. 177) as a means of valuing the literacies of both contexts. Home reading that is supportive of both home and school languages—that of the parents in the first language and that of the children learning the language of school as the second—has been found by Gregory (2008) to provide an alternative to “deskilling” the parents when they are unable to assist the child with the work that comes home from school. Gregory’s concern that the responsibility for poor performance in school is laid at the feet of the child and the home has caused her to partner with other researchers including Williams (2004, 2005) and Baker and Street (2004), to address the interaction between teachers and children of different social and cultural backgrounds in the classroom. Gregory, Long, and Volk (2004) examined not “just the actual extent of different cultural resources in children’s lives, but ways in which only certain resources [were] deemed to be valid and valued by the school” (p. 4). Through the use of classification (defining the strength between categories such as home and school) and framing (establishing patterns of behaviour and communication in school), Gregory et al. (2004) examined the pedagogic discourse of the classroom world. They determined that

the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) of the children rested on what they brought with them as resources from home. Within one research site where the parents were authentically involved both in the classroom on a daily basis and supporting home literacies when out of school (e.g. different languages, different pedagogies), both the visible pedagogy (from home) and an invisible pedagogy (from school) were evident as the children became confident learners (Gregory et al., 2004, p. 104). However, the children at a second site where their out of school environment was much less predictable than that of the first research site, were also “racing ahead” because of the pedagogy of a teacher who “respected and shared a similar interpretation of ‘work’ as did the families” (Gregory et al., 2004, p.105). Gregory’s studies demonstrate from the perspective of the home and of the school, the importance and value of school and home working together to support children’s literacy experiences.

Another practice utilizing home literacies as a bridge to the new literacies of school is creating “identity texts” (Cummins, 2004), pieces of text that draw on the child’s first or home language and culture and present information about the child’s identity in ways that link it to the literacies of the school. The creation of these texts by individual children or groups of children working together has been shown to offer greater degrees of personal and cognitive engagement than knowledge transmission (Cummins, Bismilla, Chow, Cohen, Giampapa, Leoni, Sandhu & Sastri, 2005). Similarly, in creating a text using more than one literacy, students bridge from the known of their own language and culture to the unknown of the school Discourse community, and are also helping to bring others into their world. As another example of using language and

culture to bridge literacies, dual language texts are the same story narrated in two languages such that the text of each can be viewed together (Gregory, 2008, p. 95-96).

The literature describes an abundance of multilingual literacy opportunities that can arise during daily classroom interactions. Among the researchers who have captured these events and practices within their research are: Ann Haas Dyson (among culturally diverse urban settings in the United States, 1993), Lisa Delpit (in relation to the African-American school-aged population; 1996) and Courtney Cazden (with the Mexican-American youth in California, 2000). I will look briefly at the findings of each of these researchers beginning with Ann Haas Dyson.

Dyson's research is most often situated within the classrooms of young, urban American children where she, "listens . . . to the children's [voices]" (2006, p. 149). Much of her research is ethnographic and based on a Bakhtinian (1986) dialogic perspective on language. She asserts that listening and building on prior conversation "potentially transforms children's voice-filled lives into a plethora of literacy resources" (Dyson, 2006, p. 149). Further, Dyson contends that curricula must be undergirded by a belief that meaning is found not in the artifacts (e.g., texts, figures, conversations) but in the social events through which those artifacts were produced and used. By drawing on the cultural backgrounds of the children in the classroom and welcoming their uses of "cultural symbols as material for story construction and social affiliation" (Dyson, 1996, p. 479), the curriculum in her studies became grounded in the children's social lives. Dyson suggests that although current teaching methods purport to embody our "best practices", they are not reflective of practices that are able to serve all communities and all peoples. As Bailey and Pransky (2005) have pointed out, "there is no such thing as a

culturally neutral classroom or a ‘best practice.’”(p.21) It is important to note that the use of the term “best practices” as it is used here differs significantly from the LNS connotation and refers to specific reading and literacy strategies backed by cognitive-based research into the best ways in which to teach specific skills in reading and writing. The universalizing of pedagogy into “best practices” has been critiqued by many researchers, including Lisa Delpit.

Delpit’s (1996) influential work, *Other people’s children*, caused many in the education sector to stop and take stock of the classroom practices that they were using under the guise of being helpful to all children. What Delpit was quick to point out was that the curriculum and literacy practices that caring educators were unwittingly enacting in their classrooms were actually predicated on a set of cultural and linguistic beliefs that are not universal and that are imbued with distinct cultural and social values. Delpit cited a version of the Whole Language movement that held to a specific understanding of process writing as a practice and open classrooms as being counter to the learning needs of the African-American students with whom she worked. Further, she demonstrated that the concerns voiced by teachers of colour in relation to these “best practices” were largely ignored; they became a “silenced dialogue” (Delpit, 1988, p. 280). If Delpit’s work is taken seriously, educators must acknowledge that the notion of “best practice” pedagogy and strategies often referred to in the school improvement literature is actually “best” for only a narrow band of students in a classroom. Ironically, as Bailey and Pransky (2005) point out, “a universalized educational orientation may actually *prevent* caring educators from recognizing the strengths and learning needs” (p. 20) of other children who are not part of this narrow band.

Courtney Cadzen's (2000) work with Mexican-American secondary school students and her research with Marie Clay examining Reading Recovery[®] as a situated practice highlight other considerations leading to responsive classroom practices. Her research seeks to take cultural differences into account in the designing of programs and pedagogies appropriate for learners from minoritized cultures. Her use of the phrases *identity multiculturalism* and *adaptive multiculturalism*, taken from Bateson (1994), are two complementary but different strategies. Multiculturalism can support individuals in their own ethnic identities (individual multiculturalism) or it can enhance everyone's capacity to adapt by offering exposure to a variety of other traditions (adaptive multiculturalism). While adaptive multiculturalism can be a means to learn over the course of a lifetime in a continual process of encountering difference (Bateson, 1994, p 167 as cited in Cazden, 2000), identity multiculturalism is a means to learn to value individuals through culturally relevant teaching (Cazden, 2000, p. 259). This connection with individual identity resonates with the work carried out in select Ontario schools by Jim Cummins and a team comprised of educators and researchers.

Within Canadian contexts, Cummins et al. (2005) is involved in a Canada-wide action research project entitled *The Multiliteracy Project*. It is based on participant observation within several classrooms in the Peel and Toronto District School Boards. Giampapa (2010) elaborates on the multimodal, multilingual, and multicultural pedagogical means by which the teacher brought the home identities of her students, and herself into the classroom as one of the successful practices noted in the project. The teacher opened up space in her classroom for languages other than English to be audible

and artifacts visible and intentionally drew on student identities to create “a space that affirmed student identities and challenged mainstream culture.” (p. 420)

In this section, the ways in which multilingual literacy opens up possibilities for literacy learning by beginning with the “situated self of [the] learner” and building upon those selves “in their diversity and in the multilayered nature of each person’s identity” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000, p. 147) have been introduced. By utilizing multilingual literacies as opposed to bilingual, the researchers in this field acknowledge the multiplicity of languages, texts, and Discourses that comprise literacies. I now leave the meso and micro levels of this study to focus on the literacies and home literacy practices of the minoritized culture that I take as my case in this research, the Low German-speaking Mennonites.

2.2.5 Literacies of the Low German-speaking Mennonites

The available research related to the Old Colony Mennonites is limited. That which has been recorded is often the work of an outsider using a religious or historical lens to narrate an aspect of the culture (e.g., Martin, 1923; Roth, 2011) or to tell the story of Mennonite settlement (Redekop, 1989; Dyck, 1993). Alternately, work that comes from sources inside the Gemeinde is limited in what can be shared by virtue of the strict tenets by which the Old Colony Mennonites live. Therefore, I begin with a discussion drawing on the available literature to paint a study context for those who may not be familiar with this cultural group before reviewing the available literature that is relevant to this work.

The particular case of literacies among minoritized populations--that of the LGM--is viewed through a multiliteracies lens in this section. Within a given culture there are different literacies associated with different Discourse communities (e.g., home, church, school; Gee, 1990). In Ontario's public schools, literacy is predominantly taken up as autonomous literacy where literacy "progress" is measured through on-going large and small scale assessments (e.g., Developmental Reading Assessment, DRA; Pearson, 2005) that privilege reading and writing (Kress, 2003). The results of these assessments are tracked and compared to those of other children, other classes, and other schools. Children who do not meet rigid government and system prescribed standards are labelled "at risk" and are often positioned as being deficient (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008), and pathologized (i.e., Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005).

While "at risk" is a phrase that is frequently applied in both medicine and education, its meaning is difficult to capture in a way that would be applicable to the myriad of ways in which the term is used. In a report prepared by the Canadian Educational Statistics Council (2000), "at risk":

has been applied to children and youth experiencing a wide array of difficulties, ranging from exposure to perinatal stress, poverty, abuse, death of a parent, to school, failure, teenage pregnancy, and juvenile delinquency. And, while there may be many ways in which these categories intersect with one another, there is not yet a universally agreed upon definition for the "at risk" term. (Schonert-Richel, 2000, pp.3-4)

In this study, these at risk children include the minoritized children whose first language is Low German. Because the LGM culture is founded upon an oral history, they do not share the dominant print literacy focus found in the Ontario public school system. This situation could be described as resulting in “a puzzling contrast—really an awesome disconnect—between the breathtaking diversity of school children and uniformity, homogenization, and regimentation of school practices from pre-kindergarten onward” (Geneshi & Dyson, 2009, p. 5). “Literacy” in Ontario schools is largely defined in terms of students’ ability to read and write in English, measured on large scale assessments, and is supported by a curriculum steeped in the values and practices of the dominant mainstream culture. School literacy practices are often positioned in stark contrast with the literacies and practices LGM students engage in outside of school. Many of these same children are able to speak Low German, High German, and often Spanish as a result of their travel to and from the colonies in Mexico (Old Colony Support, 2012).

There is little current research available related to the literacies of the LGM. Hedges (1996) completed some work in the area of the apparent *diglossia* (where two dialects or closely related languages are used by a single language community) between High and Low German among the Old Colony in northern Mexico. A recent publication from Old Colony Support (2011) entitled, *Called to Mexico*, is a narration of the experiences of Amish teachers from Ohio, USA who have spent the last decade in support of the Old Colony Mennonite schools in Mexico. However, literature directly related to education is based in the parochial school environment (Roth, 2011), or on the experience of a Mennonite narrator (Quiring, 2009), who has been sanctioned by Mennonite ministers and bishops (e.g., Hertzler, 1971; Kraybill, 1977) and is dated. As

the reader will note from the references in this section, in some cases the “most recent” work relevant to this study is from the 1970s and 1980s, leading to the conclusion that this cultural group is either difficult to research and/or because of the conservative and traditional nature of their literacies that not much has changed to warrant further study. My study will contribute directly to the research in this area and addresses the apparent dearth in the literature related to LGM children in public schools.

2.2.6 The literature on the Old Colony Mennonites

According to Gregory and Williams (2000), acquiring literacy in a new language, “is a complex business involving several languages” (p. 167). Further, as noted by Luke & Kale (1997), “the differences that children bring to classrooms are not simply idiosyncrasies... They are the products and constructions of the complex and diverse social learning from the culture(s) where children grow, live and interact” (p.16). When viewed through a multiliteracies lens, the many and varied demonstrations of literacy by minoritized children at school will differ from the at-home literacy practices of the same children because literacy is being used for different purposes within different domains. Such is the case for the Low German-speaking Mennonites especially in regard to their home literacy practices.

For many of the groups of LGM in Ontario, their customs and dress today are similar to their forefathers and customs stretch back to the 1874 Diaspora from Russia (Dyck, 1993). Even within the dress there is “coding” as to the orthodoxy with which they adhere to the tenets of their beliefs (Scott, 1996). In Ontario, the dark scarf of the married women signifies that they are baptized, and may be migrants from Mexico, while the embroidery indicates that their heritage is rooted in the Ukraine (Reimer, 2008).

People who are familiar with the traditions of the Low German-speaking Mennonites can “read” their clothing and distil important information from the garments (Redekop, 1989, p. 91). Such subtleties are significant to those within the different groups of Mennonites in Canada (Reimer, 2008) and make it difficult to generalize across the LGM. However, the language of these people *is* common – a dialect that is a hybrid of Dutch and German which is spoken but rarely written or read (Epp, 1999). Because it is predominantly oral, Low German itself subtly metamorphoses as the speakers migrate to different areas (Mexico, Belize, Paraguay) and use this oral method of communicating with each other (McCaffery, 2008).

Mennonites continue to practice a “gendered apprenticeship” (Rogoff, 2003) in which the women are the primary childcare providers, homemakers, and liaison with the school, while the men are the providers and the interface for the “business” of the family (e.g., at the bank). Those whose responsibilities require that they interact with “the English” (anyone who is non-Mennonite) also learn rudimentary reading and writing skills – enough so that they can conduct business in town. The girls learn at a young age how to care for their siblings and often are kept from school to “help out” at home. The boys, on the other hand, are expected to attend school to learn to read, write and “do numbers” with sufficient acumen to conduct business in the community. Rarely do the girls attend school beyond Grade 8, although this demographic is slowly changing among the less conservative groups (Roth, 2011).

“Discipleship” is central for the LGM; this is a community with strong religious ties (Redekop, 1989, p. 136). An important aspect of discipleship is language and literacy form and use. Within the Old Colony there is an apparent diglossia (Hedges, 1996)

between the appropriate use of High German and Low German that also affects literacy practices in the domains of home, school and community. The use of High German is rooted in its use as a liturgical literacy—that is, children need to hear and understand High German as the language of the church service, daily prayers, hymns, and the Bible. Low German, on the other hand, is relegated to the vernacular (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) and is the language that is used to communicate with the community at large or within the home setting. The most orthodox Mennonites hold that High German should be the language of instruction in their schools as promised in the Privilegium signed between the elders and the government of Mexico in 1922. If no one in the home is educated in the dorf (village) school Mennonite educational system that uses High German as the language of instruction, then the family is in essence cut off from understanding the tenets of their faith (Quiring, 2009). While Old Colony Mennonites attend church, and join in by rote to the hymns, they often cannot connect to the sermon given by the minister (C. Peters, personal communication, May 2011) or to his reading of the Lutheran Bible: this is problematic when the LGM are identified as “Biblicists” (those who use the Bible text in its literal interpretation as the authority for doctrine and life) (Redekop, 1989). The Bible – used in schools as a reader, in church and in the home as the Word by which Old Colony Mennonites conduct their lives—is the text at the centre of what it is to identify as Mennonite (Martin, nd, p.12).

Languages and literacies have distinct purposes among the Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico (Hedges, 1996) and some of these understandings have travelled with them into southwestern Ontario. In addition to being categorized into “Sunday” and “everyday”, the notion of literacies and the roles and distinctions between the use of High

and Low German are directly related to the “Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft continuum” (Redekop, 1989, p. 128). Community has always been an influential factor in the thought and life of the LGM. There is a spectrum of “community” that is exemplified by the two different ways in which Mennonites take up notions of community—as either the Gemeinschaft relationship of the family, or the Gesellschaft that is fostered in modern economic relationships. While families living in rural areas support more Gemeinschaft relationships (those exemplified by kinship, friendship and neighbourhood)—including the adherence to language directives from the bishops—those Mennonites who work in the local economies or who interact with “modern economic enterprise” nurture Gesellschaft (Redekop, 1989, p. 129). With this demonstrated diversity in languages and literacy within their Mennonite community, how are the LGM students positioned as they enter the Ontario public schools where English is the language of instruction and the language of conversation? The next section begins with a definition of school literacy and then explores the ways in which that definition is enacted within an Ontario, English-speaking public school.

2.2.7 School literacy in Ontario public schools

In selecting from the variety of descriptions of literacy in schools that permeate the research in the field, I have selected that of Purcell-Gates et al. (2004) as it relates to reading and writing in school for the purpose of this research. These researchers consider “school literacy” as “the literacy that is taught, measured and valued” (p. 66) or as an academic literacy that promotes the skills which are supported by the dominant, mainstream sociocultural group. Furthermore, by over-valuing academic literacy, schools (and the institutions that supervise them) “devalue background and ignore other

literacies—local literacies practiced by people who do not succeed with academic literacy” (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004, p. 66). There is a need to challenge this view of literacy as a “unity view” where a national language is transmitted through a largely print-based, linear pedagogy (Street & Lefstein, 2007). NLS describes literacy in ways that are not “universals”, but rather as context specific across different Discourses and within various domains.

There are a number of specific Ontario educational policy documents that recommend in-school language support for students who qualify as English Language Learners. The definition provided by the Ministry of Education is narrow and refers to those born outside of Canada or who have been in Canada less than five years (Ministry of Education, 2007). However, the ways in which this policy is enacted varies significantly from school to school. Current ESL instruction that precludes the use of the home or first language (L_1) to learn the second language (L_2) is labelled as a subtractive method of instruction because often English literacy is acquired at the loss of first language (L_1) proficiency (Krashen, 1982). While students “learn” to communicate in English, they often show little academic progress once mainstreamed and they rarely catch up to their peers (Freeman, Freeman & Mercuri, 2005). It is the privileged Discourse of the dominant culture that has mandated school literacy—reading and writing in English (Jewitt & Kress, 2003)—to be achieved by every student.

In Ontario, English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction can only be given for a maximum of five years and is carefully monitored by data available at the provincial level but inputted at the school level. In the face of research (e.g. Cummins, 1979/2007) that suggests that acquiring a new languages takes as long as seven years, this shortened,

five year period demonstrates that students need time and support to become proficient in the use of academic or school literacy. However, it may also be reflective of the economic imperative and the drain on resources that reduces the time that a child spends in ESL support to a mere five years. Moreover, research (e.g. Thomas & Collier, 1997) has shown that if a child has no prior schooling or has no support in native language development, it may take seven to ten years for ELLs to catch up to their peers, if they do at all. The transnational migration patterns of the LGM culture would place them squarely within this finding. While there are some who view the scattered pattern of school attendance as a disregard for the importance of education within the LGM worldview, others view sporadic school attendance as a reflection of economic need and the dire consequences that could ensue if the crops in Mexico should fail in a year. Further, non-attendance is more a valuing by the LGM of work over public school (High School and Beyond, Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, 2012).

During the last decade, the elected government of Ontario has had a significant interest in, and support for the education portfolio (Office of the Premier, Ontario Ministry Backgrounder, 2004). It set in place a system of standardized tests and rigorous accountability with the intention of raising literacy rates. By 2008, 75% of Ontario students were to score at the “Ministry standard” of Level 3 (70%) or better on the Grade 6 reading assessment as measured on the Junior Assessment of Reading, Writing and Mathematics (EQA0). To support principals in meeting these targeted literacy standards, the Ontario Ministry of Education has published an array of documents and supplementary materials. When taken together, the increased attention of the government on education, specific targets for reading and writing, and specific documents for

administrators outlining how to achieve these targets, Ontario education was ushered into the era of increased accountability for student achievement. The connection between this increased focus on student learning and the role of the principal as school leader is explored in the literature on school leadership.

The following section examines the research related to the role(s) of the school principal as the school leader. Additionally, I explore the literature from communities of practice to highlight the ways in which this area is utilized within the field of school leadership. Because my research study uses the narratives of administrators as the method of capturing and exploring the relationship between school literacy and the literacies of a minoritized culture, an understanding of the Ontario school leadership landscape is necessary to contextualize the work. Additionally, the role of the principal has endured a shift from manager to leader with implications for literacy leadership. Each of these nuances will be explored in the following section beginning with the influences on school leadership.

2.3 Literature related to school leadership

The literature from the field of educational policy is concerned with the practical consequences of policy decisions and alternatives. From this vast and diverse research, I draw from the area of school leadership and more specifically the work on instructional leadership and views of the principal as literacy leader. I background the importance and diversity of the responsibilities ascribed to the school administrator in order to foreground their narratives related to the relationship between the school literacy and home literacy practices of minoritized students. Lambert (1998) defines school leadership as “the reciprocal learning processes that enable participants to construct and negotiate meanings

leading to a shared purpose of schooling” (pp. 8-9). The umbrella of school leadership and its inherited roles can be assumed by pursuing a number of paths to the principals’ office but the usual route is as a classroom teacher, a system leader and finally as a school administrator (Local school board Promotional Practices: Selection Procedures and Appointments of Principals and Vice Principals, 2002). With a goal to prepare and “develop leaders who are competent, equitable and just, through the provision of a program that respects relational leadership in the context of our current society and political realities” (Principal Qualification Course, 2013) the course material highlights knowledge that is imperative for school leaders (e.g., school law, budgeting and communication with stakeholders) but often overlooks specific information necessary to *lead* instruction and shape student improvement. This is also the case with the professional literature that has not addressed the content knowledge necessary to be an instructional leader (Stein & Spillane, 2003). The role of the principal as instructional leader has largely evolved through a priority shift for administrators, from managers to leaders. However, the literature is also replete with models of leadership that have been made palatable to school administrators by their apparent ease of implementation. Fullan has authored a number of texts for the Ontario Principals’ Council whose catchy titles (e.g., *Breakthrough*, 2006; *Motion Leadership*, 2009) yield to disappointing text that offer a veneer of reform. Additionally, *literacy* is often used interchangeably with *reading* within the literature and refers to principals’ knowledge of how students learn literacy (i.e., learning to read and write as school literacy) and how teachers support that learning (Burch & Spillane, 2003; Stein & Nelson, 2003). In the following section I explore what influences school leadership in relation to literacy, but focus on the impact of the

school improvement literature. Finally, to better inform the reader about the role and importance of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) within the current Ontario context, and within my study, I conclude with a section on PLCs and communities of practice. I begin with a survey of the literature on what influences the school leadership as a whole, and then specifically in relation to literacy.

2.3.1 Influences on school leadership

The educational landscape is shaped by literature that perpetuates the dominant Discourse and models of school literacy improvement (e.g., Schmoker, 2001, 2006), increased literacy “success” as measured by large scale assessments (e.g., Reeves, 2009; Earl & Katz, 2006; Kolm & Nance, 2007), and the early print literacy development by young children in Full Day Learning (e.g., Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2004; With our Best Future in Mind, 2009). As has been indicated in Chapter One, many of these studies draw exclusively from work in the United States where autonomous literacy practices dominate understandings of school literacy with “best practices” as the classroom pedagogical accompaniment (Chenoweth, 2009).

Principals work to meet the expectations of the Ministry of Education, the school board, and the local school community. What it means to be a “good” principal is defined differently in each context. In 2008, from the perspective of the Ministry and the system, “good” leadership meant that test scores were improving and that the mandated practices were demonstrated in the classrooms (Mourshed, Chijioke & Barber, 2010). From the point of view of a school community, having a happy environment where its children were safe and learning were hallmarks of “good” principal leadership as demonstrated through effective school-community relations (Pawlas, 2010 p. 32).

Further, Barth (2002) indicates that instructional leadership is about creating a culture that fosters, nurtures, and develops lifelong learning both in educators and in students. Some researchers predicate their judgment of the quality of leadership on the various processes that administrators have in place (e.g., school vision, mission and goals; Schmoker, 2004; Hargreaves, 1994). Recently, however, school leaders are being judged by criteria that are more closely related to student outcomes (e.g., Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood, Seashore Lewis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Other studies have suggested that instructional leadership does not have a direct impact on student achievement, but does have a mediated effect (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 2002). Therefore, while research indicates that the impact of school leadership on student outcomes is indirect, the result of the increased focus on accountability seems to be a narrowing of curriculum, an increase in testing, and a teaching to tests that puts certain groups in our society at a disadvantage (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). These findings parallel those from studies of other school improvement campaigns (e.g., England's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy), which stipulate that effective principals should tie their efforts closely to bureaucratic prescriptions for "good" practice (Lazaridou, 2009). As was discovered in a study by Zalesnik (1992), school administrators are often under pressure to be "conservators and regulators of an existing order of affairs" (p. 79). This finding is supported by Leithwood et al., (2006) who determined that effective school principals tend to be good at implementing externally mandated curricula and student achievement standards (Lazaridou, 2009). It would seem, then, that school leaders are effective at doing what they are told. But what hope does this offer to administrators to view leadership as

transformative (Shields, 2009) or to embrace a different perspective than that of the dominant Discourse in schools?

The literature related to the role of the principal as instructional and as a “literacy leader” and how these texts serve to perpetuate and reinforce the dominant school literacy practices and the inherent expectations of principals is key to this study. Although many educational researchers have defined or purported to have written about the characteristics of the instructional leader (King, 2000; Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Elmore, 1999; Fullan, 1988; Hallinger & Murphy, 1987; Lashway, 2002; Smith & Andrews, 1989), none of the researchers address the specific skills needed to be a leader of *literacy*. Booth and Rowsell (2007) contend that school leaders “face challenges in promoting a strong literacy program in their school: test scores, public sharing of results, class sizes, the increasing role of technology; resources for students with diverse needs and parents’ demands and expectations for their children” (p. 10). Covey (2004) concurs and notes that, “today’s principals face many challenges in their roles as instructional leaders. Their plates are full and yet something seems to get added everyday” (p.35). While administrators can be advocates of school leadership—especially literacy leadership—which “opens schools to change” and fosters a culture that mediates the children’s lives in the community with those in classroom contexts, they need support to make these changes. Perhaps a more ecological view (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003) of students’ learning could be adopted where:

rather than focusing on students’ linguistic deficiencies ... the focus would be on the socio-historical influences on their language and literacy practices, as well as on their social, economic and educational realities; as Scribner (1990) observed,

things mediated by the social both proximally and concretely; as well as distally and abstractly. (Gutierrez, 2004, p. 116)

Marzano (2009) addresses the co-opting of his work--tagged as "high yield strategies"--wherein he corrected the way in which his research was being cited (e.g., as the reason to narrow literacy instruction in some areas to include *only* his suggested strategies). In his paper, he suggests the ways in which his work should be taken up, and admonishes leaders to look beyond his strategies to a more comprehensive framework for literacy instruction to serve as the basis for professional dialogue--the antithesis to how his work was being used with teachers in classrooms. Other literature indicates, however, that enacting this kind of leadership is challenging. Implementing a school-wide literacy approach could mean that an administrator must alter every aspect of the existing system--a herculean task (Covey, 2004), and impossible to achieve within the Ontario context in which principals can be sanctioned by both their employer and the Ontario College of Teachers for non-compliance with, for example, the stipulated rules of EQAO assessment administration.

While the role of the principal continues to grow in breadth and scope, it appears that challenges to notions of "best practice" or a widened lens toward literacy outside of school improvement have yet to be taken up broadly. While principals want to be the "good principal" from the literature (Whitaker, 2003), there is a slow realization that principals are unable to meet the expectations of all stakeholders. While the literature is pushing educators toward a redefinition of the role of principal "from instructional leader with a focus on teaching to leader of a professional community with a focus on learning" (Dufour, 2002, p. 15) this perspective is not yet evident in many Ontario schools. A shift

from the principal as the repository of literacy knowledge to that of the administrator as “principal teacher” (Darling-Hammond, 2013) is slowly creeping into the Ontario context, but a change in perspective related to literacy doesn’t appear to be forthcoming as yet: “It is in the link between the demands of instruction and those of leadership that recent calls for improvement in leaders' professionalism have appeared” (Firestone & Shippis, 2003, p. 19).

Regulating the professionalism of Ontario’s principals and vice-principals is the responsibility of the Ontario Principals’ Council (OPC). It is the voluntary, professional organization for school administrators within Ontario. Its website lists five purposes of the OPC, including: representing the membership, promoting the professional interests of its members, advocating on behalf of public education, and providing professional development opportunities for its members. Recently, OPC and the Ontario Institute for Educational Leadership, a consortium of senior administration from each of the educational governing bodies in the Province, adopted the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) as a mechanism to appraise school leaders. The placemat structure of the framework presents the role of the principal as demonstrating five different “practices and competencies”: setting directions; building relationships and developing people; developing the organization to support desired practices; leading the instructional program; and securing accountability. Within each of these sections there are numerous subheadings and points, and the school leader must attend to the issues outlined (e.g., “leading the instructional program” outlines a series of related points including the first: the principal *ensures a consistent and continuous school-wide focus on student*

achievement using system and school data to monitor progress).² While a framework of this nature is underpinned by the research findings of Leithwood (2011), it would appear that the autonomous view of literacy and its inherent narrowing of the literacy practices of schools are also supported in this heavily tailored perspective of the principals' role.

Additionally, this school level framework connects to that of a district or family of schools, that in turn links to a system framework representing the entire board that combines with the other province-wide districts to give an overall alignment to schools and their leaders (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2012). While alignment may be synergistic from a provincial perspective, at the school level administrators appear to have less autonomy and are required to implement provincially mandated policies and practices. Indeed, it is evident from the wording of the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF; 2012) that “school and system professional learning teams will work together to accomplish goals” (p.10). Prominent in the discourse at all levels of administrative documents is the need to “collaborate” or to support a “collaborative culture” within the school and community (OLF, 2012). Literature on early school leadership paints a cautionary tale about working together, admonishing principals to take care not to create “contrived collegiality” (Hargreaves, 1994) by making it imperative for non-synergistic groups to work together. There continue to be educators who are cautious of collaborative groups for the “group think” (Janis, 1972) that they purport to manifest.

While people can never be made to work together, when someone voluntarily participates in a group of similarly placed individuals with the intent to respond to

² The entire framework can be found in Appendix A

common questions, the result is often successful. An understanding of the background and use of the Principal Learning Team is important to this study. I utilized the construct of a PLT as the method for collecting the participants' narratives and reflections on the critical incidents for this research. What follows is a look at the literature in the area of Professional Learning Communities (PLC), and the related PLT.

2.3.2 Professional Learning Communities and principal learning teams

The Principal Learning Team (PLT) as a smaller unit of a Professional Learning Community is becoming a familiar construct within local administrative professional development. The tenets of the PLT stem from the research of Dufour and Eaker (1998) who worked with secondary teaching staff in Chicago to effect school-based reform. Their investigations as researchers into PLCs coincided with their belief as practitioners that traditional "restructuring left students virtually untouched by the reforms swirling around, but not within, their classrooms" (p. 9). These researchers recount that neither "top down" (state legislated) nor "bottom up" (school initiated) reforms were successful on a large scale in the United States. As Fullan (1997) reported, "none of the current strategies being employed in educational reform result in widespread, substantial change" (p. 220). This political context set the stage for the creation of "Professional Learning Communities" the goal of which was to have school practitioners commit to guiding principles that focused on collective inquiry by collaborative teams to support continuous improvement in their schools. Dufour (2005) outlines the key components of PLCs even as he cautions that the term is being applied carelessly and loosely. He indicates that the core mission of education is now "ensuring that all students learn" (p. 32), that a "culture

of collaboration” (p. 36) is necessary for school improvement to occur, and that effectiveness is judged “on the basis of results” (p. 39). The results of the use of PLCs were so powerful when viewed through both the lens of teacher efficacy and student success that their uses as a mechanism for exploring and developing school-based reform swept the US and Ontario in the late 1990s (e.g., Adlai E. Stevenson High in Lincolnshire, Illinois). Now PLC language is in common use and is reflected in the new School Effectiveness Framework (Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2012).

The evidence of the effectiveness of the PLC structure at the school level was focused on the different ways that educators within a school work together to improve student learning. However, the focus at the government level indicates an increase in policy related to school improvement (e.g., the 1997 inception of the Education Quality and Accountability Office). Mandates based on “best practices” invaded the reform landscape at the turn of the twentieth century and eroded the program coherence and organizational integrity of the PLC movement (Fullan, 2001). The culture of collaborative teamwork aimed to find grass root methods to address local difficulties as proposed by the PLC literature was being overshadowed by the focus on class-by-class accountability.

Nevertheless, within the last five years, PLTs have been constructed by groups of administrators who are inquiring, questioning and “attempting to move within and across tasks, contexts” (Gutiérrez, 2007, p. 116) and Discourse communities. Because the members come together in a PLT for a particular purpose, or for a long period of time, strong professional relationships are often built. The key to the success of a PLT is trust—the belief that each member will be honest and forthcoming with colleagues in the

interest of improving practice or responding to difficult questions of leadership (Riley & Stoll, 2004; Roberts & Pruitt, 2003; Sullivan & Glanz, 2005).

In tracking the ebb and flow of the PLC ethos in the literature, most striking is the way in which it now underpins the entire School Effectiveness Framework (SEF; Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2011) and the Ontario Leadership Framework (Institute for Public Leadership, 2012). Hargreaves' warnings against contrived collegiality have been sublimated by the promise that the collaborative PLC will powerfully improve student learning. Wording to this effect can be found repeatedly within the SEF. However, mandated improvement via "best practice" is a top-down initiative. As reported by Dufour and Eaker (1998), the success of the PLC is the ownership of its members of the content of the meetings and subsequent action. The grassroots construction of a PLC, or its smaller unit of principals as a PLT, aligns with the concept of a *Community of Practice* (CoP) that Lave and Wenger (1998) define as "groups of people who share a concern or passion for something that they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 7).

A group of individuals that come together as a *community of practice* is not ideologically neutral. The members are "laden with sets of beliefs, actions and assumptions" and they meet to discuss a problem in someone's interest (Rogers & Fuller, 2007, p. 80). As a result, some people or groups can be more privileged than others with the result that PLT can be used to serve either just or unjust ends, the "group think" of which Janis (1972) warned. Building of trust within the PLT, as within a CoP, is imperative in order to encourage the participants to think critically about what they have experienced, and to share openly with colleagues their narratives that probe the "porous

boundaries across home, school, classroom, community, and society, and the possibilities these spaces offer for positive change” (Moll & Rubenstein-Avila, 2007, p. 192).

2.45 Summary

This chapter has outlined the literature in the four key areas of my research: 1) literac(ies), within which I have also highlighted the particulars of the literacies of the LGM as the minoritized cultural group in this study; 2) multilingual literacy and successful practices with minoritized cultures; 3) the Ontario school context; and 4) school leadership and communities of practice. I identified the problem of the scarcity of literature relating to the literacies of the LGM. Moreover, the dearth of research that addresses the literacies of the LGM within a public school context, and the response of principals to that lack of resources made it challenging for participants of this research to recognize and label the home literacy practices of the students.

I have drawn from key areas in the literature that could inform my work in this study (i.e., literac(ies), multilingual literacy, and successful practices with minoritized cultures, the Ontario school context, school leadership, and CoP) and I have framed this research in such a way that the relationships between school literacy and the literacy practices of the LGM as viewed by school principals are addressed. I utilize sociocultural theory, critical literacy, and the field of New Literacy Studies to underpin my work. In the next chapter, I elaborate on those theoretical frameworks and introduce my choice of Narrative Inquiry as the methodology to respond to my research goal of exploring the relationship between school literacy and the literacy practices of the Low German Mennonites as a case of a minoritized culture.

3. Chapter Three

“The fundamental link of narrative with teaching and learning as human activities directly points to its value as an educational research tool”.

(Webster & Mertova, 2007, p.15)

3.1 Theoretical framework and methodology

This chapter furthers the discussion of the theories undergirding this research and introduces the methodology I employ to explore the relationship between school literacy and the literacy practices of a minoritized culture from the perspective of the school principal. I elaborate on the aspects of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) and sociocultural theory (Dewey, 1929/2004; Rogoff, 2003) that work in tandem to frame this study. Drawing from the New London Group (1996) and work of Freire (1989), I also add critical literacy theory to create a trio of complementary theories. Additionally, I discuss the rationale for choosing Narrative Inquiry and the methods of data collection and analysis in this research. The recursive process undertaken during the collection and analysis of the data as both a researcher and as a participant-observer is explained with the aid of a figure constructed for this purpose. I also unpack the interconnected issues related to ethics, insider-outsider research, and unique contextual considerations related to working with minoritized cultures in general, and the Low German-speaking Mennonites in particular. During naturalistic research, what is planned is not always what happens and the researcher must be open to new opportunities as they arise. Such is the case with this research, and I foreshadow some of the surprises that occurred and the ways in which the research eluded the intended design and continued in a more emergent way. These unintended opportunities will be more fully discussed in Chapter Six.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

I combine multiliteracies, critical literacy, and sociocultural theory to create the theoretical framework for the study. I draw on the work of the New London Group (1996), and in particular the further research of Cope and Kalantzis (e.g., 2000, 2009), in which multiliteracies as a concept is seen to encapsulate the two important arguments in response to an emerging cultural, institutional and global order. Firstly, multiplicity and integration are significant modes of meaning making (i.e., where “text” also relates to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioural) and reflect a pedagogy that includes six design elements and multimodal patterns (i.e., connecting modes and utilizing them in relation to each other to make meaning) that are useful in translating the “what” of multiliteracies into the “how” of creating “social futures” in the school, the workplace, in both the community’s and public’s futures (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, pp. 4-7). Secondly, increasing local diversity and connectedness entails plurality (i.e., English is a world language and multiple differentiated dialects or *Englishes*, the use of *multilanguages* (Lo Bianco, 1997), and communication patterns that cross cultural, community and national boundaries). When coupled, the notions of multimodality and multilingualism have the potential to transform “both the substance and pedagogy of literacy teaching not only in English but also in other languages around the world” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 6). The use of a multiliteracies framework in this research includes broad understandings of literacy as both socially constructed, inclusive of multiple languages and represented through a spectrum of *modes* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The use of the work of the New London Group (1996) foregrounds the importance of

cultural and linguistic diversity in the plurality of text forms that are often multimodal (Mills, 2006), a consideration that is salient to this research.

A second, complementary theory utilized in this study is that of critical literacy in which the interpretation of texts is more than simply decoding the words, but rather, considers the language used as a social construct that is never neutral (Shor, 1999). For Horton and Freire (1990), critical literacy entails a reading “not just of the word, but of the world” and developing the capacity to rewrite, redesign, and reshape literacies in communities’ interests (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). For Luke and Woods (2009), cultural analysis as a key element of education against domination and marginalization, a commitment to the inclusion of those marginalized or disenfranchised by schooling and an engagement with the significance of text, ideology and Discourse in everyday life features in their critical literacy. However, while social justice is often a prominent theme in critical literacy theory, its enactment doesn’t proceed from an assumption of exploitation or an abuse of power. There is not one static critical literacy but rather, it is an “evolving concept” (Comber, 2003, p. 356). In my research, critical literacy is used to frame the texts that principals use to define the literacy practices in their schools and how those same texts position the students from the Low German-speaking Mennonite culture.

The final plank in the framework of this study is provided by sociocultural theory and specifically sociocultural views of literacy that highlight texts as tools to mediate learning for a variety of purposes. Within this research, it is important to understand literacy practice as a broader sociocultural repertoire of practices used to mediate learning (Larson & Marsh, 2009, p.132). While Rogoff (2003) argues that high order functions (e.g., language) develop out of social interaction, the importance of developing skills

within a group setting reaches back to the work of Dewey. In *School and Society* (1900), Dewey proffered that, “language use is a social activity where theory and experience meet for the discovery of meaning and purpose” (pp. 55-56). It follows, therefore, that the use of sociocultural theory as a lens through which to view this research would not only encompass a multiliteracies framework, but also complement its tenets of multilinguals, multicultures and multiple ways of representing meaning within a local community and increasingly within a global society.

The following section delineates my research design and includes a discussion of the research method. I make explicit the ways in which the overarching theoretical framework, comprised of a multiliteracies framework, critical literacy, and sociocultural theory, works synergistically with the choice of Narrative Inquiry for this research. It is important at this juncture to revisit the research questions in order to keep them foremost as the filter through which to sift the remainder of this chapter.

3.3 Research Method

3.3.1 Research Questions

Merriam (1998) asserts that the researcher’s intuition plays a key role in qualitative methodologies in which the aim is not to measure but to uncover and explain the nuances of complex and rich narratives. My own questions prompted me to go to the literature where I discovered that what I had been observing among LGM students and their families was one of the ways that minoritized cultures navigate the different and often confusing literacy of school (e.g., Cummins, 1994). As I tuned in to the discussions of my colleagues at administrator meetings and conferences, I discovered that some were

passionate about the lack of support for ELLs, often the LGM, in their schools, and the constraints that the EQAO assessment placed on them as they sought to create opportunities for these students to demonstrate what they *did* know about reading and writing English. Reinforced by this knowledge, both from the literature and from the narratives of other school administrators, I embarked upon this study to respond to the research questions:

1. What can the stories of principals teach educators about the relationship between school literacy and the literacies of children who are minoritized?
2. What have principals learned about literacy teaching and learning from LGM children and their families?
3. What have principals done in the school environment to support the school literacy development of primary children who are minoritized?
4. What influences how a principal leads a school community (e.g. definitions of literacy)?
5. What are the implications for principals as literacy and curriculum leaders?

The lived experience of both myself and the school leaders, in addition to the administrators' stories of literacy leadership with the Low German-speaking Mennonites as the catalysts for this research, made narrative methodology the most fitting methodology to use. In the following section, I elaborate on the usefulness of Narrative Inquiry to respond to my research questions.

3.3.2 What is Narrative Inquiry?

Narrative research as a qualitative methodology has diverse interdisciplinary applications. However, there are common characteristics regardless of the field in which it is used

including: learning from the participants within a given setting; stories as a way of reporting both personal experiences and social interaction with others; the story as the first person telling or retelling of events; and the story--or field text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)--constitutes the data and is gathered through interactions or conversations (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Narrative Inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) as a derivation of narrative research draws on the Deweyian belief that “life is education” (Dewey, 1938, p. X). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) define narrative inquiry as, “the study of experience as story, [as] first and foremost a way of thinking about experience . . . To use a narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under study” (p. 477). It is a research method that begins with experience as expressed in the lived and told stories of the participants. As described on the webpage of the *Narrative Inquiry Journal*, “narrative inquiry gives contour to experience and life” (www.clarku.edu/faculty/mbamberg/narrativeINQ, accessed July 2012). This method is deeply rooted in the notion of experience through the telling of stories, and attending to the context surrounding the narratives to add levels of meaning. Data thereby becomes multilayered, contextualized, and much more than a story. Because I examine the principals’ perceptions of the relationship between school literacy and home literacy practices of the Low German-speaking Mennonites it is a natural fit for this research study.

The temporality of narrative inquiry makes it a balancing act. While experiences are often viewed as continuous (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002) with one event leading into another, it must be remembered that any research is “but a moment within a social or communicative event that is inherently partial, [and] belonging only in part to that

researcher” (Broome, 2006, p. 41). However, the participant has had other experiences both leading up to and following that “moment” captured by the researcher (i.e., “inquirer” in Clandinin and Connelly’s work) or the story told by the participant. It is the role of the inquirer to work in collaboration with the participants to collect experiences and memories as expressed through their stories. These narratives become the “field text” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), complex data that include audio taping, transcription, detailed observations, field notes, and other supporting artefacts. The final written work is the “research text” (Murray Orr & Olson, 2007) that contains the narratives of the participants but has been shaped by the researcher to place emphasis on the *inquiry* of the Narrative Inquiry. According to Murray Orr and Olson (2007), “it is the inquiry into the stories that may create an educative experience” (p.823). Woven into the narrative of the participants may also be the narrative of the inquirer as she gains insight into herself (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

The intimate, first hand nature of this research requires that the researcher positions herself in the field as close as possible to the participants. One of the “fields” in this study was the group discussions with principals of schools that have a large population of LGM students. The community halls, schools, and meeting rooms of buildings situated near the schools of the principals were another field of this research. Additionally, the local community in which the principals’ schools were located and the Low German-speaking Mennonite families who lived and worked there also figured as a field of this study. The literature on narrative research (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2013) suggests that it is important to spend extended periods of time in the field both prior to, and during, the research to establish credibility and

trustworthiness. These aspects of ethical “wakefulness” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. X) are expanded on later in this chapter.

3.3.3 The choice of Narrative Inquiry

Within the education field, teachers and administrators often speak of their work in anecdotal terms as school experiences and practices (Wolcott, 1973; Lortie, 1977; Goodlad, 1984). This “telling of tales” enables educators to reflect on their experiences as they share them with others and offers the listener(s) an opportunity to explore the situation vicariously through its recounting. Narrative also entails *deconstructing* experiences: that is, focusing on a text to take it apart, examining the contradictions, gaps, and silences and being reminded that the meaning brought to a text is never obvious or neutral (Moon, 1992). The use of deconstruction is illustrative of a social constructivist view of the world, one that holds that there are multiple meanings that can be assembled by bringing together various perspectives and interpretations. Those who adhere to this epistemological position believe that there are multiple sides to every experience as opposed to a single accepted reality. Within this research, the use of a narrative methodology enables different points of view to be voiced as data, recorded as stories, and then placed side by side during the analysis phase to find patterns, themes and discontinuities. The narratives of the participants and the deconstruction of their stories by other research participants is key to exploring the phenomenon being studied; in this case it is the relationship between school literacy and home literacy practices of students from a minoritized culture. The principals, as the participants in this research, related their stories, shared their experiences, attended to and probed the narratives of others, and created shared spaces for viewing literacy in different ways. In the section that follows, I

outline the choices that I made in electing to use the administrator voice in my study, how the participants were selected and specifics about their careers.

3.3.4 Participants

The recruiting of administrative participants for this study initially appeared straightforward. The most important criterion for participation in this research was that principals had experience in working with the Low German-speaking Mennonite population. I was familiar with the LGM settlement areas, and had lived and worked in an area that had a number of schools with significant populations of LGM children as students. Following the October approval of my ethics application (Appendix B) by the Faculty of Education Ethics Review Board at the University of Western Ontario, and subsequent approval by the school board that was the employer of the participants, I approached the administrators (principals and vice-principals where assigned) of each of these schools to invite them to participate in this research. As a senior principal in the local school board, I was known to many of the area administrators. However, several were new to the principalship while others had had no experience working with the Low German-speaking population. A small number had worked with me previously on other projects within the school system. I was overwhelmed by the positive responses I received from the school administrators when I invited their participation in the work. A principal with a system responsibility related to the area of study, but who also met the research criteria regarding experience with leading schools with a concentration of LGM students, requested to join the PLT and was welcomed by the other members. Additionally, one member of the PLT retired during the data collection period, but wished to continue with the research. This mix of participants offered a diversity of

experiences in relation to: education, the role of an administrator, and working with Low German-speaking Mennonites. Administrators of both genders participated and a number of cultures were represented, but not Mennonite.

Participant name ³	Role	Years of administrative experience	Years working with LGM	Years in present school	Other pertinent information
David	Principal	12	3	3	Taught in faith-based school
Keith	Vice-Principal	1.5	1.5	1.5	Background in language at system level
Catrina	Principal	8	less than 1	less than 1	Experience in rural schools
Roberto	Principal	12	1	2	Variety of administrative experiences
Teresa	Principal	17	10	5	Retirement year
Thomas	Principal	16	8.5	4.5	Resides in area
Lily	Principal	20	8.5	4	Works in a language system role
Aganetha	Retired Principal	10	7	5 years in last school	Resides in area
Carolina	Principal	6	3	5 – one as principal; 2 as Vice-Principal	Resides in area

Table 1: Demographic leadership information of study participants

The initial research design that was passed by the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Board proposed the inclusion of a second local school board that also had LGM students. I suggested technological provisions such as the use of video conferences or Skype to address the issues of distance or inclement weather that could potentially

³ Pseudonyms are used throughout

preclude their participation. I anticipated an expanded data set that crossed two jurisdictions and added several more participants to the discussion group. However, after a few months and more than a few attempts to move the process along, I still had not received permission from the second school board. In conjunction with my supervisor, I determined to go forward with the research using a single school board. I contacted the volunteer participants from the respondent school board in person inviting their participation and setting a date, time and venue at the beginning of second term for our first meeting. In the following section, I narrate the construction of what is referred to in the literature as a PLT as the primary source of my data collection. Further, I relate how this team met and worked together to respond to the research goal of exploring the relationship between school literacy and the home literacies of LGM students.

3.3.5 Constructing a Principal Learning Team (PLT)

When considering the data collection mechanism for this research, I weighed several alternatives including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, or a discussion group comprised of participants that could come together, listen, and share with each other—taking away their own learning as well as contributing to the research. It was my intent to devise a research structure that could capture the first person experiences of a number of principals who had also led schools with concentrations of LGM children. While semi-structured interviews could provide me with opportunities to listen to, record, and analyse the narratives of individual administrators, I alone would be privy to the principals' stories, their perceived successes or failures, the nuances of word choice, emotions, concerns, and questions. Focus groups would potentially create an interview-like scenario with the researcher as moderator, a role and an approach that didn't suit the

type of co-constructed learning environment that I sought. As someone with a social constructivist view of the world, it was critical for me to involve others in speaking, listening, and responding to each other within a community of trust and sharing. I elected to structure a PLT whereby the principals could meet together in a “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to relate their stories with peers. Within this environment, participants could share stories, collectively deconstruct those narratives, and then offer alternative strategies and responses. Lave and Wenger (1991) describe a community of practice as, “people who come together in groupings in everyday life, in the workplace and in education” (p. X). These communities are characterized by the mutual engagement of the members, the common enterprise around which they are involved and a shared “repertoire” of common resources of language, styles and routines—some could argue Discourses (Gee, 2001)—by which they express their identities. A PLT meets the criteria of Lave and Wenger to be recognized as a community of practice. Further, in their work with PLT groups, Dufour and Eaker (1998) contend that a “culture of collaboration” (p. 36) is necessary for school improvement to occur. The regular use of the PLC and the more focused PLT structure have become so commonplace in the Discourses of educational administration in Ontario that the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF, 2012) uses it as the understood method of cooperative work for principals.

A PLT should not be considered a focus group. The use of focus groups as a qualitative data collection tool originated in marketing where it was used to gauge the public’s reaction toward a product, service, concept, advertisement, idea, or packaging (Kitzinger, 1994). A focus group is defined by Marshall and Rossman (2011) as a method

for the “interviewer [to] create a supportive environment, asking focused questions to encourage discussion and the expression of differing opinions and points of view” (p. 149). It affords a number of advantages including the ability to accrue large quantities of data in less time than would be taken in a series of one-on-one interviews and the creation of a socially supportive environment to encourage those who would not necessarily offer much during a single participant interview. However, the limitations of focus groups have important implications for this study. The heightened role of the researcher as a moderator and discussion leader sways the power differential from observer-participant to participant-leader. It was important to this research to flatten (to the extent possible) the traditional hierarchy of power, often present in focus groups or interviews, in which the researcher is seen as the “leader”. A more collegial negotiation of topics, questions and follow-up was required and extended as far as creating a Doodle[®] scheduler (software application) to establish meeting dates and times.

The PLT (as a smaller version of the PLC; Dufour, 2002) is a structure that is well-known within administrative circles. This construct was initially intended to empower its participants to ask questions, and to create a space for participants to discuss topics of mutual interest and concern, and make decisions as equal partners in the process. My aim in using the PLT as a data collection tool was to build on the aforementioned strengths. Participation was completely voluntary and the principals could choose whether or not to participate or leave at any time. I had no expectation of a product as an exit strategy in response to the questions discussed by the PLT. In using this discussion based structure, I did wish to collect the questions, responses, commentary, and shared narratives of the administrative participants as they interacted

with each other and with me as a participant-observer. Additionally, I wished to use the structure of the PLT as a CoP so that each of the participants could hear and learn with and from each other in a way that was comfortable and familiar.

Upon reflection, much of the success of the PLT can be linked to the shared purpose of the participants (i.e., to share narratives and experiences as part of a research study on the relationship between school literacy and home literacy practices of LGM), their voluntary participation, and the relationship that existed among the administrators from prior experiences of working together. The level of trust among the participants was high and enabled them to be candid with one another without the fear of repercussion should a comment leave the meeting space and be attributed negatively to a principal. The element of trust is also imperative for using Narrative Inquiry effectively because of the intense and intimate nature of collecting data, and framing the field text in relation to participants' lives (Clandinin, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007). Throughout the process, the inquirer collaborates with the participants by checking the narratives and negotiating their meanings. Each story that is selected (or not) for the research text; each word chosen (or rejected) is done so in the participants' imagined presence to reflect the "unfolding of people, places, and things in the inquiry--the personal and social aspects of the inquirer, and of the participants' lives, and the places in the inquiry" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p.485). As I revisited the field texts comprised of the discussion from each meeting described carefully in my notebook, transcribed the audio tape, and then shared the manuscript back with members of the PLT for checking, I was aware of my feeling of responsibility for the research text and to the participants, not only in what I had captured, but also how I had represented the stories. Each participant was invited to offer

feedback and request to have information redrafted or comments deleted from the transcript. That no revisions were offered, I inferred as an indicator of a high level of trust from the administrator participants.

The development of a trusting atmosphere within the PLT was also critical in order to sensitively address the direction of the discussion and the kinds of issues that could arise during our conversations. While I posed the original question (what is literacy?) and shared my narrative of “The Colouring Curriculum” (see Appendix C) at our inaugural meeting in February, the discussion was taken up in a very different way than how I had anticipated. In keeping with the work of a true PLT as it differs from a focus group, there was not a designated moderator or leader to “keep people on track”. Therefore, when the group dialogue followed a different pathway to what I had predicted that it would, my duty to the PLT and to the research was to follow the discussion and not to try to bring the conversation back to my agenda as the researcher. At face value, the discussions in the PLT were never directly related to my research questions as they might have been in an interview or focus group setting. However, upon analysis and reflection by both the participants and me in an iterative process of breaking down each other’s stories and recreating or elaborating upon the key ideas with details and experiences of our own, the participants helped to identify important ideas. These threads were nuanced and often disguised within topics that were more urgent for the principals to deliberate including assumptions about the “Other”, generalizations about LGM culture, and educational policy decisions related to English as a Second Language (ESL) to name a few. However, recurrent patterns appeared within the discussions and these became important themes in the data. In the next section, I will elaborate on the ethical

considerations that preceded decisions about: working with both the Low German-speaking Mennonite population as well as with the principals in the PLT; data collection within the group meetings; data sets that offered a plethora of information related to my research goal of examining the relationship between the school literacy and home literacy practices of LGM students as viewed by the principals of their schools.

3.3.6 Addressing issues of rigour

While the ethical demands of any research remain constant in the responsibility that is held by the researcher to “do no harm” to the participants while searching to answer a hypothesis or question, the way in which rigour is demonstrated differs slightly between quantitative and qualitative methods. When research is taken out of the more controlled conditions that are traditional in a lab setting and into the field of the classroom or school, the resultant findings must also be reliable and trustworthy. Lincoln and Guba (1985) established four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative work such as this research study: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. Coupled with Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) reminder to be “ethically mindful”, this doctoral research needed to account for participants in two cultural groups: that of the administrative PLT, and the members of the LGM whose stories were told. As a former principal, I realized that I was “edgewalking” (Krebs, 1999, p.1) not only with the Mennonite group to whom I am an “outsider”, but also with administrators with whom I once had insider status, but to whom I now represented the academy; I was consequently cast as an outsider. In this work with two distinct cultures, I was “wakeful” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to the necessity of establishing and maintaining ethical practices that include participant anonymity, and adhering to Guba and Lincoln’s criteria of rigour

when reporting this work as research. Pseudonyms were used for the participants throughout this study, and specific locations that could identify the research area have been renamed. This study does encounter a problem with respect to the limited number of schools boards within the research area that have LGM populations, and fewer schools that have Old Colony Mennonite students. The specific research jurisdiction within southwestern Ontario also goes unnamed but those who are familiar with LGM settlement patterns will be acquainted with this region. Finally, as suggested by one of the principals in the study, the children and families in their recounted narratives are nameless. This is not simply ethical posturing to maintain the anonymity of the LGM children about who little has been researched or written. Nor is it a study “simply about the interesting stories of [a group] whose lived experiences have been and are still, pathologized” (Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005, p. xviii). It is however, a focus on the perception of principals on the relationship between school literacy and the literacies of a minoritized culture. I was mindful, therefore, about what I brought to the conversation as both an insider and outsider—an “edgewalker”—in this research in order to make this research dependable, transferable, confirmable, and credible.

3.3.6.1 Credibility

In order for a study to be credible, it must offer an honest and representative snapshot of the phenomenon (Creswell & Miller, 2000); in this case, of principals’ perceptions of the relationship between school literacy and literacy practices of a minoritized culture.

Further, it must be believable from the perspective of the participants in the research. To this end, I have gathered the data from the principals first-hand using audio tape, taking field notes to record the details that cannot be captured auditorily (e.g., pauses, glances,

references to documents), and then nesting that data to create a transcript that represents a specific PLT meeting. Additionally, I teased out the critical incidents or key events that helped to shape the perceptions of the participants. My narrative of a meeting was brought back to the next PLT meeting and shared with the group for examination and comment. In narrating an incident, retelling, deconstructing and then rebuilding it, greater nuance of the event was captured (see Appendix D, Keith's Christmas Story). Further, in the writing of this research I hope to engender in readers a feeling that the experience was lifelike, believable, and possible (Ellis, 2004; Chang, 2008) or authentic, adequate, and plausible (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

3.3.6.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results from this study can be applied to other research, in this case, with minoritized cultures and questions of literacy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While responsibility to identify transferable points rests with the person applying the findings to his or her circumstance, by carefully describing the research context, and the method as well as clarifying any assumptions that were central to the study, the judgment whether or not to use this research in future work is made easier for the reader. It is incumbent upon me, therefore, to make the research design, data collection, and analysis as clear and transparent as possible, leaving an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that is easily followed by those wishing to refer to this work. Transferability, and the notion of audit trail, links to confirmability.

3.3.6.3 Confirmability

Qualitative research, and in this study the use of narrative inquiry, tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the work (Marshall &

Rossman, 2011). Rather than discounting the importance of point of view in the study, the researcher seeks out ways in which the results can be corroborated and confirmed by others to develop verisimilitude. Within the research, I have left a comprehensive audit trail through the coding, patterning and naming of the themes during analysis. Further, I utilized member checking of the transcriptions of the interviews and PLT meetings whenever possible. Finally, the iterative nature of the critical incidents of the participants being returned to the group for further discussion helped to control any researcher bias that could occur in the work and offered triangulation of the data that was collected. The dependability of the results, the final of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, is predicated on the audit trail that I leave throughout the research.

3.3.6.4 Dependability

Based on the assumption of replicability, both within qualitative work and this narrative study, dependability refers to the ability of another researcher to obtain similar results were he/she to conduct the study. Dependability emphasizes the need for the accurate collection and recording of data, and a responsibility to account for any changes that occur in the context of the research or to the design of the study. As I alluded to earlier in this chapter, research does not always go according to plan, and in the case of this study those "research surprises" are accounted for in Chapter Six.

Further to the four criteria described above is the important consideration of trustworthiness within this study. In the following segment I outline with greater specificity the ways in which I was allowed access to both cultures (that of the administrators of schools within the local school board, and the Low German-speaking Mennonites who consider me an outsider) by virtue of my time in the field, the integrity

with which I had worked with LGM in the past and the perception by both groups of the importance of the research.

3.3.6.5 The importance of trustworthiness

Were I to isolate one criterion that was imperative to the ethical conduct of this study it would be my trustworthiness reflected in the ways in which I was welcomed by the administrator participants and by the Low German-speaking Mennonite community. Trustworthiness has been described as a characteristic of the researcher hallmarked by her integrity (strong sense of justice and fairness), benevolence (looking out for the welfare of others) and competence (seen as capable, knowledgeable and successful with the necessary skills to complete the work; Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). Within the contexts of this research, however these criteria (i.e., integrity, benevolence, and competence) of trustworthiness would be demonstrated differently. The administrators within the study were well aware of my work as a former school administrator within a local school board and my service with the Ontario Principals' Council (the voluntary, self-governing body that oversees administrators within Ontario) and viewed me as both competent and benevolent. They knew that I had experienced similar situations to those they faced on a daily basis and expected that I would take that background into account when undertaking the research. Trustworthiness in the eyes of the principals meant that I recalled my own time within their ranks and worked to portray the role of administration within the research demonstrating integrity. From the point of view of the LGM community, the longevity of my work within the community for over ten years as an administrator in schools with concentrated populations of LGM children was currency and a demonstration of my integrity when working with this group. As a result of my

benevolence, I have been welcomed into some of their homes, attended religious services at their invitation, and been asked to serve on committees that network between the Mennonite Community Services (MCS) and other service providers. I have been placed in a position of trust by members of their community by emulating Christian values that in turn honour the beliefs of the LGM community. I have been told by members of the LGM that I acted with integrity when conducting affairs related to the LGM at school (e.g., inviting girls to participate in physical education with shorts under their skirts as opposed to only wearing shorts, singing Christmas carols at our Christmas concert instead of focusing on a winter theme). Additionally, writing letters to support an absence from school in order that the younger children could accompany their parents to work as a family in the fields, donating materials to the Mennonite Central Committee, and meeting with the church leaders have afforded me the credibility of an “edgewalker”. Indeed, an LGM case worker referred to me as their “honourary Mennonite”, a title in which I took great pride as well as feeling the weight of great responsibility. Without the trust of the LGM group in the area, the depth of my own understanding of their literacy practices would not afford the insight required to help principals to deconstruct their own narratives of school literacy and literacies of the Low German-speaking Mennonite children in their schools. As will be described in the following section, my role varied during the data collection and at times I was confidante, resource, advocate, participant and observer, but always remained the researcher.

3.4 Method

This segment of the chapter addresses considerations of the data: working with the Principal Learning Team, the importance of critical incidents to the research design, data

sources (including a trip to Northern Mexico to observe the literacies used by the LGM in that context), and data collection, and finally how the data sets were brought together and analyzed using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) "Three Dimensional Framework" as a starting point. Additionally, I adopt a reflexive stance on my own role throughout the data collection process to illustrate how the researcher within narrative research has many different functions. I begin with a discussion of the work with the Principal Learning Team as my prime data source.

3.4.1 Principal recruitment and data collection

I began my work with the single school board in the hope that the second board would not be long in responding to my invitation to join the study. As a former principal, I also realized that there were natural entry points into the principal's year: August, January, April and the end of June. In order that the PLT be convened and data collection not drag out too long into the school year, I approached administrators in the designated research area early in January. I personally made contact with each principal in order to outline my research, invite them to join the PLT, and leave the Letter of Information (see Appendix E) for their consideration. I followed this introduction with an emailed Doodle Scheduler[®] so that we could collectively establish the date and time of our first meeting. Rather than meeting at a school, or at an alternate venue that was available to me albeit with connections to the Mennonite community, I elected to rent a board room within a community centre that was central to most of the schools of the participating principals. I was initially concerned that my timetable for data collection would be at odds with that of the principals and the remembered ebb and flow of administrative demands. However, once the first meeting was held, the principals were

very open to meeting together in the late afternoon, after school, and even during the summer. I took this flexibility to be a sign not only of their willingness to participate, but also of their interest in the research and the importance of having an opportunity to meet together to discuss a topic that was “local” and not “system” in nature. While Skype and conference calls were offered to these administrators as alternatives in the event that meeting in person was not possible, this group always met face to face. The PLT came together several times over the course of the year as indicated by Table 2 (below) including a meeting with a guest speaker, and a visit to another school board to meet with the principal, supervisory officer and staff of a school with a similar student demographic to those of the participants.

Date	Location	Participants	Emergent focus of discussion/purpose of meeting
28.02.11	Rented boardroom	8 administrators	Reading through the consent form with the participants and their signing it, addressing questions, beginning discussion “What is literacy?”
04.04. 11	Rented boardroom	9 administrators	Transcript from last meeting shared. Discussion of cultural assumptions – of the LGM and of the LGM of school. Policy related to EQAO
26.04.11	Mustang School library	10 administrators	Transcription from last meeting shared. Guest speaker from inside the Old Colony; responses to questions of creating a welcoming space, policy conflicts and language uses
12.05.11	Sabre School library	9 administrators	Transcription from last meeting shared. Tour of school programs created to support LGM students and parents; contributions for administrator primer
17.05.11	Hero School Tour	7 participants	Transcription of last meeting shared. Tour of LGM school in another jurisdiction. Debrief in library of school. Discussion about possibilities in participants’ schools e.g., types of literature, signage
16.06.11	Boardroom	10 administrators	Transcription of last meeting shared. Debrief following LGM conference and tours of

			parochial schools in area
24.08.11	Rented Boardroom	10 administrators	Transcription of last meeting shared. Materials for constructing writing – photos, stems in dual language formats; dual language texts from A-Z books
14.10.11	Various schools of participating administrators		Transcription of last meeting, and interview transcription data where appropriate was shared. Delivery of master set of materials to each school; discussion with principal (and often with additional teachers e.g., ESL, Literacy Coach) about suggestions for use
26.02.12	Sabres School library	8 administrators	Discussion of future of PLT now that research concluded. Agreed by principals to continue to meet. Set as goal a fall night for parents and children of those beginning school in 2014.
24.04.12	Sabres School library	10 administrators	Sharing of observations from research trip to Mexico to offer background on what schools are like in Mexico – administrators made comparisons to Ontario and if/how modifications can be made locally

Table 2: Principal Learning Team meetings

The content of the PLT meetings was shaped by the direction of the discussion, questions of the participants and sharing of narratives by the principals. Participant Aganetha described the meetings as “based on a lot of respect for each other. Obviously [we] aren’t here to learn how to change our students but are in the humble position of learning to be a better educator” (Field notes, 15.10.2011). I had anticipated that I would need to share my stories to stimulate discussion among the participants. I was wrong; there was no lack of productive talk during the meetings. The enthusiasm of the group was such that there was rarely a lull in the conversation or a lack of stories being recalled, shared, retold, deconstructed, or discussed. I noted that within the group, storytelling seemed a natural way to share experiences, and often the most salient lessons were learned through hearing the *critical incidents* of others in the PLT.

3.4.2 Critical incidents

In this study I use *critical incidents*, shared as stories by the principal participants, as a way of bringing forward the administrators' experiences with school literacy and the home literacy practices of the LGM students in their schools. Newman (2000) has defined a critical incident as, "those moments which allow you to stand back and examine your beliefs and your teaching critically. . . They can arise through reading, or overhearing a comment, or noticing how someone else is doing something you've always taken for granted, or suddenly seeing your own learning differently" (p.11). From my administrative experience, I shared a narrative that I have since entitled The Colouring Curriculum (Appendix C). The event described in the narrative occurred during my second year as a principal at my last school and was the epiphany (Denzin, 1989) that caused me to stop and rethink what literacy meant, and how it was enacted both in school and in the homes and communities of the children - especially those from an LGM background. I was visiting with a child outside on the yard and she was gleefully attempting to teach me some Low German phrases. I happened to see this same child in two different circumstances within the school - one in an ESL withdrawal group and the other in the regular classroom setting where she was present in the class but not in the literacy activity. Instead, by virtue of her lack of English, she was sitting alone and colouring. I recalled witnessing the frustration of this child, the helplessness and lack of support of the two teachers involved, and my own lack of knowledge on how to intervene and make changes. I went to my office and recorded in point form what I had observed. Later, as I reflected further I realized that the collision between the definitions of literacy (school literacy and multiliteracies) was an important issue to investigate. This critical

incident became the catalyst for this research, and was the only personal critical incident that I shared with the PLT.

When considering the design of the narrative inquiry, I needed to structure a way in which the critical incidents of the participants could become data that was in turn taken apart and *deconstructed* by the group to create a second set of field text. These data were then nested within the discussion of the entire PLT that I collected as a participant observer using audio tape. In the days following the PLT meetings, I transcribed the audio tapes and included the critical incidents within the transcript and as appendices. The transcripts were returned to the participants for review which in some cases prompted further examination of the narrative. The recursive and nested nature of the data is graphically represented in the following figure (Figure 1).

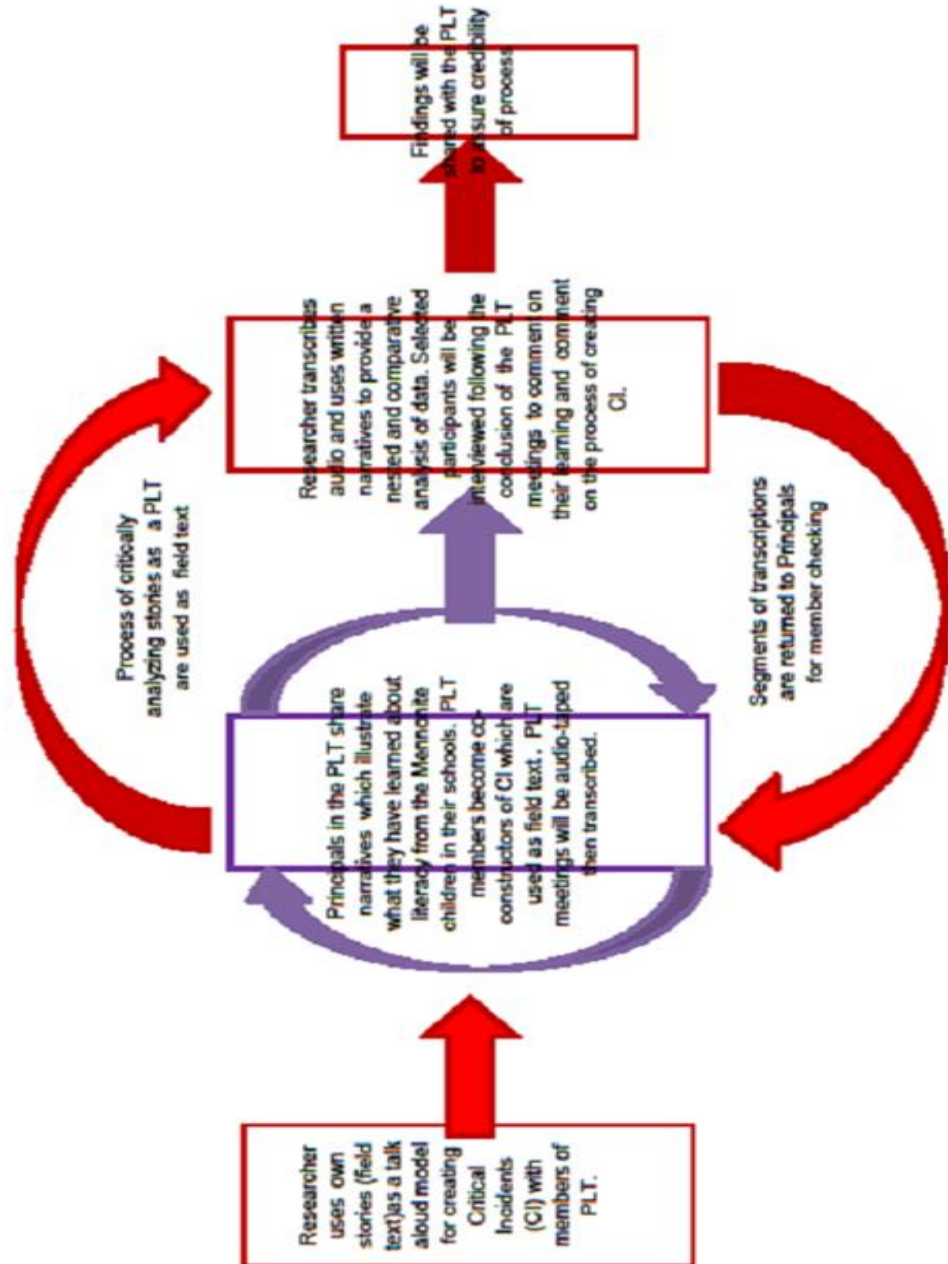


Figure 1: Role of critical incidents in the research

The model illustrates the ways in which critical incidents were used as catalysts for discussion within the PLT and as sources of data in their own right as part of the research. In the following section I expand on my data sources, the ways in which the data were collected and how they were framed in preparation for analysis.

3.4.3 Data Sources

There were numerous data from this research study and the collection began with my first face to face contact with the administrators when I invited them to participate in the research. The data were comprised of: audio recordings of the PLT discussions, transcriptions of those audio discussions, separate documentation of the critical incidents shared by both the researcher and the participants, descriptive field notes that recorded interactions of the participants that could not be captured on audio tape, and the additional CD recordings made of the PLT discussions. Additional data were gathered from semi-structured interviews, conversations, email, and phone communication and was comprised of: email, semi-structured interview audio data and the transcribed manuscript, field notes of telephone conversations, photographs of principals' work, participants' mindmaps, and other graphic organizers.

In addition to these primary sources of data, my work was informed by additional background information that was gathered on a research trip to Cd. Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua, Mexico the area from which the Ontario LGM migrations originate. I was accompanied in Mexico by a Low German-speaking teacher and pastor who was also well-known in the area. David lived on the Santa Clara colony in Mexico during his youth, attended theological school, taught and preached in Cuauhtémoc before moving to Manitoba to work. His path was quite unusual for his time, and he was considered deviant by most LGM in Mexico. David continues to have family in Mexico with whom he visits regularly. This insider access afforded me glimpses into the daily life of the Mennonites (e.g., homes, schools, factories, and churches) and helped to clarify the data that I had collected from the PLT. Other data tools that afforded me a deeper

understanding of the complexities of the LGM culture included: personal communication with a number of Mennonite insiders in southwestern Ontario including service workers, pastors, and members of the Rhinelander Church.

During PLT discussions, I used audio recordings, member-checking of transcripts from previous meetings, written critical incidents from previous meetings, and detailed field notes in an attempt to capture the complexity of what was being narrated. I also burned a CD to facilitate repeated listening of the PLT discussion that I could play in my car during road trips or while reviewing the field notes. This repeated listening invited me into the narratives in a way that I could concentrate on what was said, what words were selected, the tone of the conversation, and who was involved in ways that escaped me “in the moment” of data collection. Once I felt that I had captured the nuances in the data to the extent possible, I moved to the transcription of the discussion in preparation for member-checking at the next PLT. Data analysis in Narrative Inquiry is not readily teased out from data collection as it is constantly being compared by going forward and backward through the data to confirm, question, verify, or elaborate on patterns and themes. The next section elaborates on the analysis method in this study paying particular attention to the Three Dimensional Analysis framework proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000).

3.4.4 Data Analysis

Conducting narrative research often blends the data collection and data analysis phases of the work (Chang, 2008). As expressed by Connelly and Clandinin (2006), the writing of a research text is in itself a narrative act. Because of the difficulty of making clear demarcations between collection and analysis, I describe the data sets for each

aspect of the research in Table 3 below. Within the table, I have recorded the types of data that represent the variety of field texts that constitute this narrative inquiry.

According to Article 2.2 of the Ethics Regulations, Research Ethics Board approval was not required in order to include the data that I collected as observations during my unplanned trip to Mexico. The kinds of texts that I collected are recorded in the table below.

Purpose	Data Source	Specific Data Types
Narrative Inquiry	Field text data from PLT discussions	Audio files of PLT meetings, transcripts of audio, CDs of audio files, detailed field notes taken by the researcher, correspondence related to meeting venue and dates, contributions to documents created by PLT, email to establish visits to other schools and invite guest speaker. Critical incidents (Newman, 2000; Patton, 2002) or epiphanies (Denzin, 1989) told by the PLT participants and used to connect to work with individual principals
	Semi-structured interviews with interested principal participants	Audio files of semi-structured interviews, transcripts of audio, CDs of audio files, detailed field notes taken by the researcher, correspondence, photos of principal work, mind maps or graphic organizers used by the participants to describe their work as an administrator
Personal Background	Trip to Cd. Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua, Mexico	Accompanied Low German-, Spanish-, English-speaking guide to observe and participate in life on the colonies. Data includes audio files for personal use, personal communication with church leaders, Rhinelander and Old Colony Mennonite families, school principals and school board officials, photographs, maps and artefacts. Collated as a resource on the home literacies of Low German-speaking Mennonites

Table 3: Data sources and types of collected for this research

To begin our first PLT meeting, I reiterated the purpose of the research, my method of conducting the study and the purpose of the principals' involvement in the process. As the school leaders were signing the letters of consent, participant Thomas asked me, "Why do you want to do this study"? I remember stopping and thinking, "No . . . Don't ask me that! I don't want to be construed as leading you in any way and I want to start with a question like, 'What is literacy'." Instead, I heard myself telling him and others in the group who were now listening to the story of *The Colouring Curriculum* (Appendix C) and how I had begun to question whether I was really meeting the needs of the LGM students in the school by fulfilling the literacy mandates of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. I shared that I had begun to feel alone in believing one thing about children and literacy and doing another to meet the expectations of me as the principal, and wondered if any other school leaders thought about the school literacy in relation to the practices that I saw the Low German-speaking Mennonite children demonstrating. In hearing myself on the audio tape, the soliloquy is quite short, but at the time I recall hearing the blood pound in my ears and feeling that time was going so slowly. In my field notes it says "Not about me!" (Field Notes, 02.02.11) and I am reminded of my desire to move the discussion quickly away from myself and back into the group. Thankfully, Thomas picked up the thread and the PLT was well and truly underway. I checked the recorder, settled back, and took copious field notes to offer a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) that could be laid beside the transcripts of the audio files.

The transcription of each PLT meeting was important to help to confirm the discussion and to capture the authenticity of the speakers' remarks. Additionally, the

sharing of each transcript with the group at the start of each subsequent meeting enabled me to triangulate the data and confirm what was said and by whom; how it was spoken; who talked; who didn't speak; who spoke when, and then weave the entire event into one narrative with the assistance of the group. I also burned CDs of each PLT meeting so that I could play them in my car during long road trips and could re-enter the discussion to listen for stories that I may have missed or misrepresented.

I repeated the same process with each of the PLT meetings--create a CD and listen, listen and listen again and then transcribe the audio file for member checking of the text. As the discussions became more complex, I listened deeply to the voices. I heard passion, pain, sadness, regret, embarrassment, humour, frustration, and humility. It became important in the compilation of these field texts to combine listening to the audio with reading my descriptions of the discussion to absorb the nuances. As I listened, I teased out the narratives from different members and set those aside to be revisited either at subsequent PLT meetings or as an additional part of the data collection that was done with each member of the group who consented to a semi-structured interview (see in Appendix F, questions). Revisiting the narratives; asking questions; probing details, and finally "re-storying" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 329) or re-presenting the narrative were important aspects of the PLT discussion.

3.4.5 Three Dimensional Narrative Framework

The transcriptions from each of the PLT meetings became a narrative in their own right. While none of the principals wished to rewrite, reword, or revise the transcripts, I waited until the PLT had reviewed our work before going back into the transcriptions for further analysis. I chose the Three Dimensional Narrative framework (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000) as the most useful tool to help me to consider the PLT story as a whole, and to weigh the importance of the individual narratives of the principals within each meeting. The framework echoes Schwab's (1969) description of fundamental aspects of curriculum that he identified as curriculum "common places" (i.e., the subject matter, the view of students, the role of teachers, and the nature and significance of the milieu). I take the "echo" to refer to the notion that there are several fundamental aspects of narrative analysis that have been referred to by Connelly and Clandinin (2006) and again by Clandinin, Pushor and Murray Orr (2007) as the commonplaces (i.e., temporality, sociality, and place) or alternately as the dimensions within a conceptual framework of narrative. However, whether a three dimensional space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) or three common places (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007) the elements remain the same - temporality (temporal); sociality (personal, social continuum); and place.

As a scaffold for thinking about the re-presentation of the PLT narrative and of several critical incidents, I thought of each of the aspects of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) framework collectively by "nesting" the stories within considerations of each of the three elements in turn. In relation to the temporal, it is important to recall that the stories capture a point in time. Each narrative has a past, present, and future, and the story and its participants must be understood as being in transition. The second common place is the position of the story on a continuum between personal and social. How public is the story? What are the implications of others knowing about the incident? If it is retold, what could be the impact on the participant or on the teller of the story? Additionally, consideration must be given to the contextual factors supporting the story

(e.g., environment, people) that help to form the narrator's context. Here too, the relationship between the teller and the inquirer comes into play as an "inquiry is always in relation to participants' lives" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). The final element is that of place: specific, concrete, physical - the "topographic boundaries of place in which the inquiry takes place" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). When taken together, these three dimensions construct a way to consider narratives as more than simply stories, but as an opportunity to consider aspects of what has been shared, take them apart, change an element and then reconsider what was said. Murray Orr & Olson (2007) refer to this as "bump[ing] up against something"; it is perhaps not until there has been time to think back on a situation, that the significance becomes apparent.

The telling of narratives, changing a dimension and then reconsidering the story relates to the work of Schon (1983) and his concept of "reflection-on-action" where the work of narrative inquiry moves the emphasis from the telling of the story into the text and to a focus on the inquiry (Clandinin, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007). It becomes thinking *about* the story. The use of the Three Dimensional Analysis framework helped me to reframe the PLT discussions, and select critical incidents from differing perspectives. By returning the transcripts of the meetings to the participants, I invited their points of view to become part of the re-presentation of the work in the research text as a set of "nested epistemologies or nested knowing" (Lyons, 1990, p. 173).

3.4.6 Creating a "Research Text"

In moving from field text to *research text* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), it was imperative to continually check back with the participants to authenticate the writing to ensure that I had captured the intended meanings and nuances. The peer checking

became an important part of the collection and analysis of data in regard to the deconstruction of the critical incidents. As I indicated earlier in this section, the critical incidents from the data collection were teased out of the PLT data set to act as a catalyst for discussion and bring the group back to points that had been raised in previous meetings for further consideration. In part, working with the critical incidents also served as another way of triangulating the data, but my original intent was to use the stories to find connections between the administrators as leaders, and the research goal of exploring the relationship between school literacy and the home literacy practices of a minoritized culture. Instead, the critical incidents became fodder for the discussion of the group to explore an aspect of the narrative that should change. Take the example of Keith's Christmas Story (Appendix D). His reading of the minoritization of Low German Mennonites was challenged by the attendance of so many traditionally-dressed LGM parents at the school's evening Christmas concert. Up to that point he had been making assumptions about the population of LGM students in the school based on the cultural marker of dress. Witnessing the large congregation of proud parents in traditional dress at the concert helped Keith to understand that even though the children dressed in the garb of the more "western" culture, they were still members of the LGM community. Through deconstruction of the narrative commonplaces in the story, the participants in the PLT identified the importance of principals' understanding of the LGM culture. As the research progressed, this theme was repeated throughout the conversations, interviews, discussions, and telling of stories.

I continued to reread, compare audio and field notes, nest stories within each other, set them side by side, and look for commonalities (or anomalies) using methods

related to open coding (Glaser & Straus, 1967; Straus & Corbin, 1990) and Handsfield's modified Constant Comparative method (2006). However, Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) caution to "resist attempting to squeeze the language of narrative into a language created for other forms of research" (p. 184) echoed in my head. As a result, once coding for threads of commonality and difference could be twined into patterns, I left the PLT discussions and turned to the more intimate data from the semi-structured participant interviews.

As I began to write the research text following the PLT meetings, I also began to notice that the individual voices of the principal leaders in the study were being consumed by the collective voice of the entire team. Additionally, there were several members of the PLT whose passionate accounts dominated the discussion and overshadowed the softer whispers of others. It became important to balance the group voice from the PLT with those of the individual participants from semi-structured interviews. Having a one-on-one conversation with interested participants enabled me to triangulate the data from the PLT meetings and unearth the nuanced perspectives of principal as school leader, literacy leader, and school administrator.

In addition to the PLT meetings, I had a great deal of contact with the participants. The semi-structured interview questions that I used with principals during our conversations were designed to tease out the beliefs of individual principals about school leadership, and literacy practices in the school. The complete list can be found in Appendix F. The participants' responses to these questions also pointed to the Ministry of Education policies that interface with their work with the Low German Mennonite community. In addition to the interviews, I tracked and compiled other correspondence

with the participant (e.g., email, phone conversations, asides during PLTs, visits to the school). All of these opportunities to discuss the work of the school leader, the literacy leader, and themselves as a leader added layers of description and nuance to data that I had been collecting during the group PLT discussions. When taken together, the PLT data and the interview data gave voice to the personal beliefs of each administrator and his/her understanding of the relationship between school literacy and the home literacy practices of the LGM as a case of a minoritized culture.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter I have elaborated on my use of a trio of complementary theories (multiliteracies, sociocultural theory, and critical literacy) to frame this research. My research brings together two cultures: that of the LGM as the children about whom the administrators tell their stories and the administrators themselves. Working as an “edgewalker” brings with it ethical considerations that I have discussed in this chapter, but that may be amplified because of the small cell nature of this study. I have discussed how the numerous data sources (including information from the PLT meetings and interviews with interested administrators) was triangulated using particular critical incidents keeping in mind Clandinin and Connelly’s conceptual commonplaces (i.e., temporal, personal-social, and place) to create the research text. The iterative nature of the data collection and analysis are hallmarks of narrative research and highlights the importance of the relationship between the participant and the inquirer. As a result, it is often within the re-presentation of the stories in narrative work where the story of the researcher is interwoven as she gains greater insight into herself.

The next chapter introduces the reader to the Ontario landscape of school administration and discusses the first theme that I identified from the data: principals' perspectives on school leadership.

4. Chapter Four

4.1 Overview

The discussions with the administrator participants in the Principal Learning Team (PLT) covered a range of topics related to schools, school leadership, working with the Low German-speaking Mennonite population as well as more personal conversations about personal values that leaders possess, what influences principals as school leaders, and why they themselves became administrators. Some members of the PLT used tools such as mind maps and other graphic representations of the influences on their roles of school leaders.

Specifically, the demands on the way individual principals lead their school and what they say that they have learned about literacy teaching and learning from the Low German-speaking Mennonite students will be presented as an amalgam of principals' comments from across the data. There are some striking parallels among the responses of the administrators in this group about successful school leadership practices. However, there are also some important differences in their views of literacy and in what influenced them to become a school leader that I discuss in relation to the current literature.

4.2 Why become a school leader?

Principal. School Leader. Administrator. The ways in which school principals introduce themselves tells a tale, and there is a difference between leadership and managership that is examined more specifically in this chapter. A survey of the literature related to school leadership reveals how the role of school leader has been transformed from that of manager to that of leader as the demands for accountability have increased (Lortie, 2009;

Deming, 1986; Burns, 1978). It is important to the research to understand how the administrators in this project--viewed as strong principals by the system and the community--described their own style and by whom or how it was influenced. Contained within the research question, "What influences how a principal leads a school community" are layers of additional inquiry to which I sought responses. I was also interested in the parallels between their career path to principalship and my own, and whether or not the participants had aspired to lead a school.

In my own case, many of my career decisions in education were influenced by strong role models and mentors, not the least of whom was my father. However, I hadn't planned to become an administrator. While I joked with a team teaching partner early in my career that I would one day be the director of our school district, under the bravado I knew that I would never leave the classroom. So what changed? It was a blend of mentors, timing, and circumstance that led to a phone call early one morning from the Director of Education and the Superintendent of Human Resources inviting me to accept a one-year, acting vice-principalship. Even while accepting that position, I still intended to return to my system position as the Learning Coordinator for Early Primary after one year as vice-principal. However, once in the new school environment, I knew that I wouldn't leave at the end of the year and return to my former position at the system level. In addition to the stimulation I found working with so many students and educators each day, trying out new ideas, and collaborating with staff and my administrative partner, I was also aware of the investment that people had made in me as a future school leader, and wasn't prepared to disappoint those people.

In coming to a school from a system position, Keith's experience was similar to mine. However, the important difference was that he wanted to be an administrator and knew that already as a classroom teacher. He accepted a system role to advance his career toward principalship. However, once in the position at the board, he changed his mind and determined that he was never going to be an administrator. He credits the exploration of topics and issues during his master's classes as the influence that started to change his mind about administration:

I began thinking, and I am constantly defending what I am doing in my program role—talking to make myself believe it. So I came up with Literacy for Sale because I honestly felt I was going from school to school selling literacy. I have changed a lot of my beliefs about literacy and how we should be schooled and I can only influence that in a school.

While Roberto's career has spanned the largest number of different schools, he never saw administration as a possible route for his skills. He enjoyed working with students in a classroom setting and making contributions to the school as a coach and key person in school initiatives. Additionally, with a wife who is also an educator, and a young family to raise, the longer hours and additional commitments of principalship didn't seem a viable pathway to him. However, he credits many of the administrators with whom he worked as being models for his own practice. Roberto cited several mentors whose reputations in the system were those of team builders, leaders who worked with families, who led with honesty and integrity, and who put family first. When he was "tapped" by the senior administration to fill an Acting Vice-Principalship, he agreed, after consulting with his own family. However, at the end of the school year,

Roberto decided to return to the classroom which he still contends was best for him and his family at that point in his career. As vice-principal, Roberto had been successful. However, at that point within the school board there was a dearth of qualified school leaders, and the vice-principal role was seen as a stepping stone to principalship instead of an important leadership position in its own right. Roberto didn't believe that the time was yet right to become an administrator. However, two years later, Roberto was again in an acting vice-principalship and in the position to go forward into the vice-principal role. This time, fully aware of the responsibilities and commitments, and with the needs of his family in a different phase than previously, he accepted the position and became a successful VP at a large rural school.

Catarina and Aganetha have similar stories. Neither had viewed school leadership as a viable career plan and it was the belief a key person had in them that inspired them to take the next steps. Catharina was on staff in a large, rather challenging, urban school. Her principal asked her candidly if she had ever considered administration witnessing how she dealt professionally with a serious matter involving another staff member. Buoyed by the support of her principal she went forward as a vice-principal. Interestingly, now from her position as a principal, she recalls looking back on her career and feeling, even as a first year teacher, that she could handle the role. This critical incident in her career serves to support the "rightness" of her choice to become a school leader. She recalls:

Things that happened to me in my career, I look back on now and realize how they influenced me. Like when I was teaching Grade 1 using that stupid literacy thing ... Distar[®]! And I had to use it with the whole classroom! It was the

antithesis of what those children needed, so they put all of these kids who were struggling into one class to use this thing. I went to the principal and said, this doesn't make sense and he got mad at me! It wasn't my place as the teacher to have an opinion. So when I think back and make decisions now with my own staff I think, what is best for kids? What makes sense? I just had the sense that my principal hadn't had much experience with ESL kids or with kids acquiring early language and thought to myself okay, if you are going to complain you are going to have to step up into the role.

Aganetha also had a key person prompting her during her career with primary and junior children in a second language context. However, in her case, the prompt was not a positive, "you can do this" motivation, but rather the candid comment of someone that she looked up to as, "one of our fearless leaders who thought I couldn't do it and that kind of left me where I was for a long time". As someone who always seeks out opportunities to learn, she too began a Master's degree, acquiring her principal's qualifications and then superintendent's papers. When she became a vice-principal, it was in a twin school situation following the amalgamation of school boards and was in another jurisdiction. As a school leader, she has been a vice-principal and/or principal in three of four counties in the amalgamated system, and the administrator with the widest range of school community experience of the PLT group.

Lily became a principal late in her career. Her choice to put her family before her work meant that she returned to education only after the birth of her three children. In her own words, Lily was a "teacher leader" who worked within the classroom but also led school-wide activities, pouring her energies into creating interesting events for the

students and their parents related to books and literacy. However, the prompting of a superintendent to apply for an administrative position resulted in her successful appointment to a vice-principalship. Within a year she was principal of another school in a different part of the system. She recalls:

[The vice-principalship] was a very challenging year—very, *very* steep learning curve for a number of reasons, and half-time teaching and half-time vice-principal in a school community that I wasn't familiar with at all. It was an expectation that you at least put your name forward to move into a principal's position and then the senior administration would determine whether you were ready or not, but they definitely did not want people who were only committed to moving into a principalship and so there was some pressure, I guess, to say you need to apply [to be principal] and you need to go through the interview and then leave it to the committee to decide. So, I did that.

Lily was principal of several large schools, and even Roberto's administrative partner, before moving into a system position. She credits the influence of some powerful female role models, and a visionary mentor for her success as a school and system leader, and from whom she has been able to distill the attributes of a successful leader. Lily is a very professional, current, and reflective leader. She believes that principals are moving more and more toward being leaders as opposed to managers and that this trend in practice is also reflected in the literature from the Ministry and Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. She trusts that the mandate for principals to create and meet in networks is a good one to help principals see the power of collaboration in the same way in which it is being

modeled for principals by the senior administration. Lily continues to look forward and comments that while Ontario principals may not be aware of it, she believes that:

[We] are positioned to go from great to exemplary even though we don't recognize that at all and I think that we need to recognize it. We are not alone as principals, and Ontario is highly respected internationally, not just for our collaboration and networks, but for our school leadership. And maybe we need to recognize that, just as you are asking me – what makes a successful school leader, and then how can we transfer that?

Each of these principals has been able to look back and isolate a person, an event or a situation that caused him or her to look at themselves and their practice and then want to become a school leader. Each of these circumstances can be cited as a *critical event*, or one that was recognized after the fact as having had a profound effect on the principal's understanding of a situation or on their worldview (Webster & Mertova, 2007). While they may not recognize the significance of the event when it occurred, in the recitation of their career path or their beliefs, it may surface as being a defining moment, as in Catarina's discussion with her first principal about the use of Distar[®], or Aganetha's disappointment that someone she valued didn't believe in her ability to be a school leader. Each of the principals shared one of three ways in which they moved forward as a leader: first, being influenced and supported by a mentor; second, the realization of a change in view through reading or further study, and finally, the recognition that they wanted to prove someone wrong in his or her perception of their unsuitability for school leadership. The importance of mentoring leaders and further study are reflected in the work of Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), and within the research

on coaching and mentoring (e.g., Normore, 2007). Additionally, the importance of continuing study and professional development of educational leadership correlates with the work of Cotton (2003) who identified twenty-five categories of principal behaviour that positively affected student and teacher behaviour and attitudes, and student achievement rates. How the administrators in Cotton's research viewed their roles as a school leader is echoed in the first theme identified from the data and the focus of the next section of the findings.

4.3 Theme one: Principals' perspectives of school leadership

My research question, "What influences how a principal leads a school community" is addressed by the first theme that I identified in the data (PLT discussions, conversations, semi-structured interviews, artefacts, and my own field notes). I coded these connected texts as principals' perspectives on school leadership. This theme encompassed topics such as: leading and managing, policy and practicality, teaching and "principalling", and principals' impressions of the PLT as a vehicle for collaboration. In response to the research question, these topics help to illuminate important aspects of school leadership and its implications for principals as instructional and literacy leaders as articulated by the principals in this study. I begin with an examination of how these principals differentiated between "leading" and "managing".

4.3.1 Leading and managing

The principals in the study define themselves as leaders. Catarina is passionate about her role as a leader:

For me [being a school leader] means supporting teachers. It's kind of like a big circle, right? So I get them the tools that they need. I help them out however I can to facilitate that learning that happens in the classroom. I do whatever I can to ensure that not a lot of other stuff happens in the classroom. I delete things [thinking] no, they don't need that right now.

Further, she makes a distinction between the leadership role and the managerial one:

Manager? Oh Man! It's making sure that we have three fire drills and health and safety meetings. It's making sure the DRA [Developmental Reading Assessment] gets done by the date – make sure, do this, making sure, getting all this done, blah blah blah blah blah...timetables, yard duty...but I've told [my staff] this. I don't believe in doing a job where you just go through the motions. If you're going to make a timetable, then make it a really effective timetable so take the time. Don't just do it for the sake of checking the box.

The box to which she refers is the list of characteristics and actions that are recorded on the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF, 2012; Appendix B) from the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. It is one of the tools used by the school review team in its assessment of schools and school leaders. The areas in the framework are numerous, the lists are long and the tracking can become onerous.

The scope of work for the school leader is very broad as is indicated by the labels of the binders and manuals in the office of one of the participant's office (see Plate 2). There is a wide range of topics for which the principal is responsible, from Special Education, School Organization, EQAO, and School Improvement through to School

Council, Collective Agreements, Community of Schools, Safe Schools, and Staff Supervision to name a few. All of this managerial work must be done, so how is the literacy *leadership* aspect of the role to be accomplished? Lily describes what she sees as a movement toward the sharing of information among principals and the collaborative networks that are being created. Additionally, she states:

It takes time for people to see your leadership style; that you're not the person who dictates how something is going to be done, but rather consults and then there is a gradual release of responsibility with staff and students. I think that there are fewer managers now. I am getting that sense from the people with whom I work . . . I think our senior administration are modeling for principals that it is more than management. When the principal is visited, the SO [superintendent] will have questions to ask that will really reveal if they are engaged in the school or if they are a principal that manages.

Lily, in her role as a system principal, is seeing the shift from managing to leading.

However, based on the number of areas that one *school* principal is juggling in addition to the role of literacy leader, the change may not yet be realized at the school level.

Roberto makes a distinction between what he calls “principalling”, managing, and teaching. While he admits to a lot of “paperwork” in his role, he also makes a concerted effort each day to visit classrooms and connect with the students. He believes as a principal it is, “important to be connected to the kids. You need that . . . if you don't have the kids . . . there's no connection and that's helpful to have that . . . and then you draw on those experiences [as a teacher].”

He asserts that everything that happened in his past has informed his future—and now that is his work as an administrator. “The teaching and the connections with kids is what keeps you fresh—that’s the leadership”, he contends.

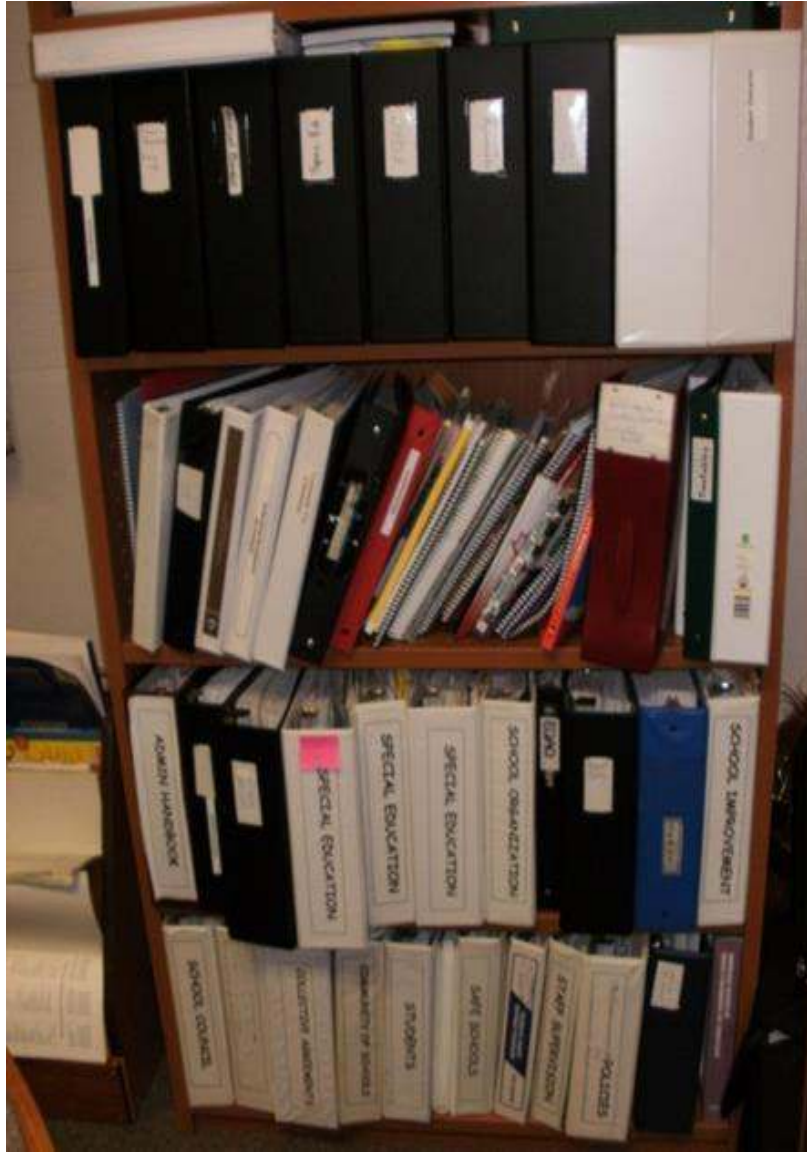


Plate 2: Binders and documents representing the wide range of responsibilities associated with the role of school leader

Carolina sees the connections between teaching and administering, managing, and leading in a different light. She is a new principal, but an experienced administrator and

believes that her role as principal is “doing what’s right for children and families”. She uses the analogy of an umbrella when she describes herself as a school leader:

It’s not that I want to say the higher up you go, you know...but the umbrella of influence is just so much bigger when you’re in this role and it’s just really exciting to see that you can have an impact on kids and parents and teachers and community just by virtue of the role. And I think that you are hindered when you are in a classroom because you have your group of kids, but the umbrella is a just a wee little umbrella.

In her position as literacy leader in a school with a large number of Low German-speaking Mennonite families, her umbrella of influence has increased significantly.

Roberto and Carolina see their roles as growing out of their background as teachers. They recognize the importance of staying connected to students. By making the decision to “step up” and lead, they assumed a greater influence in the school and in the community. Each of the principals is aware of their increased influence, both within the community and within the school system. As Catarina recounts, “when you are an administrator, they [board personnel] return your phone calls”. Aganetha highlights the need for principals as leaders to be responsive to the community in which their school is located but as also having a responsibility that extends beyond her own school. She discussed at length her personal view of leadership as one that extends across all of the students in the system and therefore she doesn’t feel happy or sad when her assignment changes. Aganetha sees reassignment as being able to serve another student and community group. She then asks herself:

How am I going to work with *this* particular group? What are they like? What are their needs? So then I flip to, what's my knowledge base? And that's when I found my knowledge base with the Mennonites being really shallow. What am I missing? What would make my experience better? So when I got invited to the first networking meeting . . . I think I had a very superficial kind of understanding of who I was going to be working with because I had assumed that because I had lived and taught in the community that I knew who these people were . . . I had a lot of growing up to do.

Principals as school leaders have a responsibility to the students inside the building and to the greater community outside the walls of the school.

School administrators are not only change agents, they must be capable of responding to change themselves--adapting to new directions in policy and differing school communities. As a school leader, Aganetha is aware of the need to learn more about each community of learners each time she is reassigned. For Keith, the need to learn or to have a change of perspective became even more pronounced as he took up his first administrative position in 2011. He was leaving a system position where he was involved with teaching teachers and administrators on the "best practices" in literacy from the perspective of the LNS and the Ministry of Education as well as developing policies that were particular to the board. He confessed:

I changed a lot of my beliefs about literacy and how they should be developed. I felt as if I was going school to school to sell literacy and making me believe it. So I came up with literacy for sale (Plate 3). What I found most interesting is that

how the moment you step out of a school you forget [what it's like] because there's what you SEE, and what you know, and then there's what you are told."



Plate 3: Keith's representation of his administrator-self as a literacy salesman

The differing views of school leadership narrated by the principal participants appear to include the role of literacy leader as the nuanced version of instructional leader.

However, while many of the principals who participated in this study didn't envision themselves in the principal's role when they began their career, each of them shared a common perspective on their work: the need to build relationships. In the case of those

principals who lead schools with a concentration of students from a minoritized culture, such as the Low German-speaking Mennonites, the importance of building relationships is akin to building trust and trustworthiness. As discussed in Chapter Three, because the LGM community is a relatively closed culture and wary of the “English” (non-Mennonites), school principals as school leaders must work diligently to foster connections--student by student, family by family--and work consistently within that relationship.

4.3.2 The importance of relationships

Each of the administrators who participated in this research identified relationship building as key to who they are as people and as leaders. A survey by Pollock and Ford (2009) contends that in the twenty-first century the importance of principals as collaborators with teachers and their role in improving teaching to improve student learning is highlighted. The role of the principal as leader is to “implement effective tools in coaching and working cooperatively with teachers to make decisions based on researched pedagogies” (p. 24). The building of relationships is a precursor to the important work of talking about teaching with teachers. Inherent in the role of school leader is the ability to work with staff, students and their families, and the wider school community that both surrounds the school and from which the school draws its unique “flavour”. As such, the relationships that a principal builds help to deepen his or her understanding of the culture of the area and thereby recognize the “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), that the children bring with them to school each day. This theme of “Principals’ understanding of the Low German Mennonite community” will be discussed in Chapter Five as the third theme that I identified from

the data. What must be remembered here, in regard to building relationships, is the length of time that is required to build trust with the LGM as a school leader who is non-Mennonite.

Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) have identified three basic practices as the *core of successful leadership*. They include: setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization (p.8). Within each practice is the strengthening of school culture and building of collaborative processes. For Lily, this has been an “aha” moment in her career:

My ‘aha’ moment has got to be the opening of classroom doors and the willingness [of teachers and administrators] to collaborate. To be curious and ask questions and not presume to have all of the answers and there is only one way to teach literacy....Provincially the networks are there and the organizational framework [OPC] is there so that I think that the Ministry is modelling for us the importance of what we have always known to be true as the networking, communicating, collaborating, and building relationships among principals.

The collaboration to which Lily refers among school leaders is also being cultivated among teachers. Stronger relationships are being constructed within school staffs, and between the school and the local community.

From the interview data with school leaders, the principals viewed their leadership and influence as extending beyond the walls of the school building. Catarina’s comments are just one example of a principal’s passionate commitment not only to the school staff but also to the parents and the larger school community. She labels her style

as “transparent” and narrated times when she would over-inform parents by calling them periodically throughout a situation and giving them updates. Catarina celebrates that kind of communication and points to it as one demonstration of the partnership between home and school, the relationship that she is building with the parents so that they “trust that [Catarina is] looking after their children”. During an interview, she described her relationships with the staff:

Yeah, I work *with* people and I’m not afraid to take the blame. I believe strongly that the most important resource I have is the teachers in the school. So I do whatever I can to make the teachers feel good about what they are doing and make them feel comfortable and get them the tools they need. I also give them a little nudge if they need it, but teachers are my most important resource so it is important to build a relationship.

Catarina’s description of the importance of relationship building to the role of the principal was echoed by Roberto. He ascertains that the school “just functions better” if there is communication and collaboration so it is important to “establish and maintain relationships” if people are to be empowered to do a good job. He adds that an important component in the building of the community at his school is also about connecting with the senior administrator to whom he reports. “Different board officials treat you in different ways, so there is a level of trust that has to be there in our relationship as well”, Roberto confides.

Another example of the range of influences on a school leader is provided by Aganetha. As a retired principal, when Aganetha constructed her Mind Map (Figure 2) to support her discussion with me about the things that she took into consideration as a

principal. As she brainstormed, she recorded all of the aspects of leading a school, its people, and the community. She told me of her role as an “orchestrator” of her network by putting herself in the centre, reaching out to each of the groups, and then making connections between and within groups.

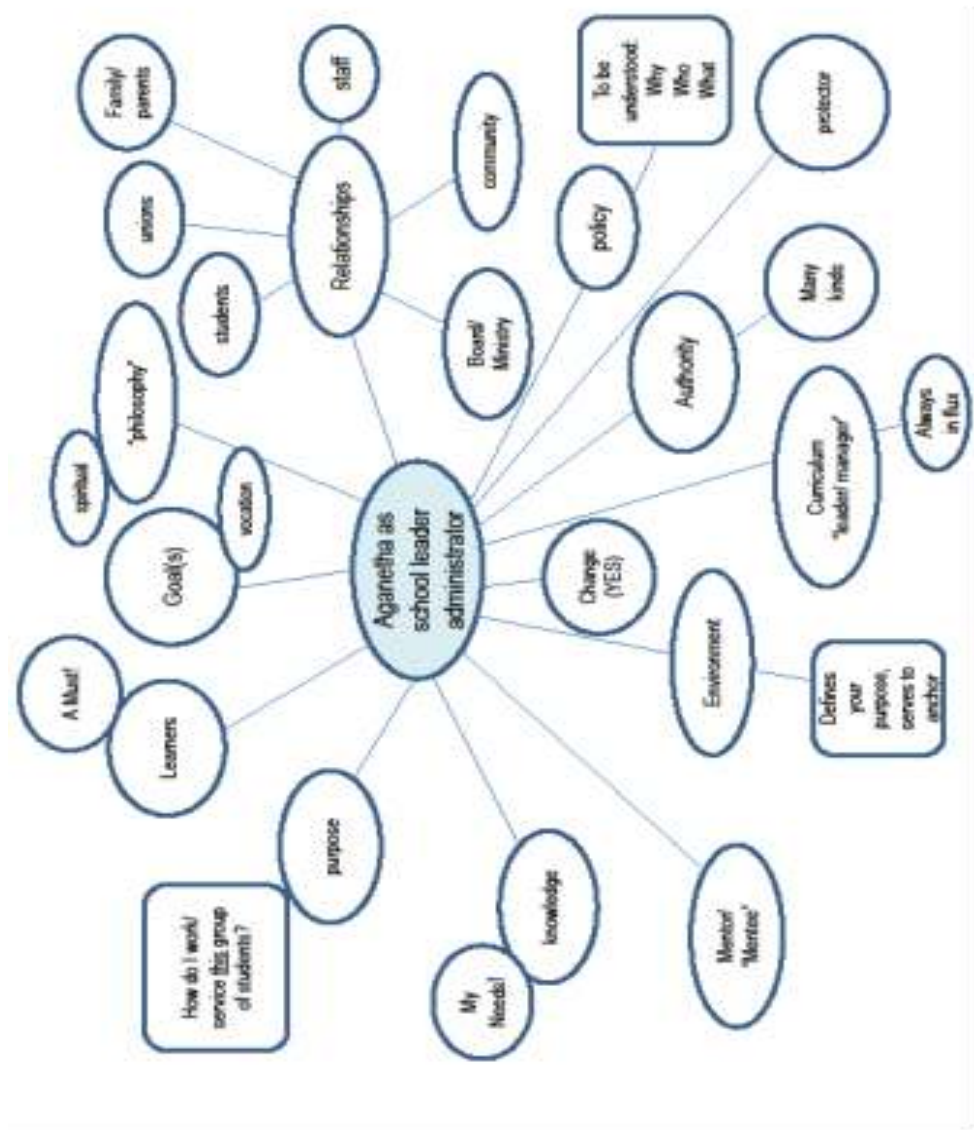


Figure 2: Mind map of what influences Aganetha as a school leader

Roberto's map (see Figure 3) also began with himself in the centre, but as he describes the relationships that he constructed, it is evident that he thought of his role differently from Aganetha:

I'm in the middle . . . what's interesting is that it became very linear which is okay, but for me it is all about relationships. My first relationship is with [my wife] as well as the rest of my family who are educators. And then I look at my coworkers and other leaders that I have worked with . . . so I learned from watching them as well or from being part of their network and feeling valued. Then in turn, when I came across somebody who didn't fit that mold I learned from them as well. I learned what I didn't want to do. I appreciate being valued by my coworkers—like colleagues and even now [as an administrator] I still consider myself part of the team . . . that we work together and that people don't work FOR me. Working with people, working with kids, I always enjoy those relationships.

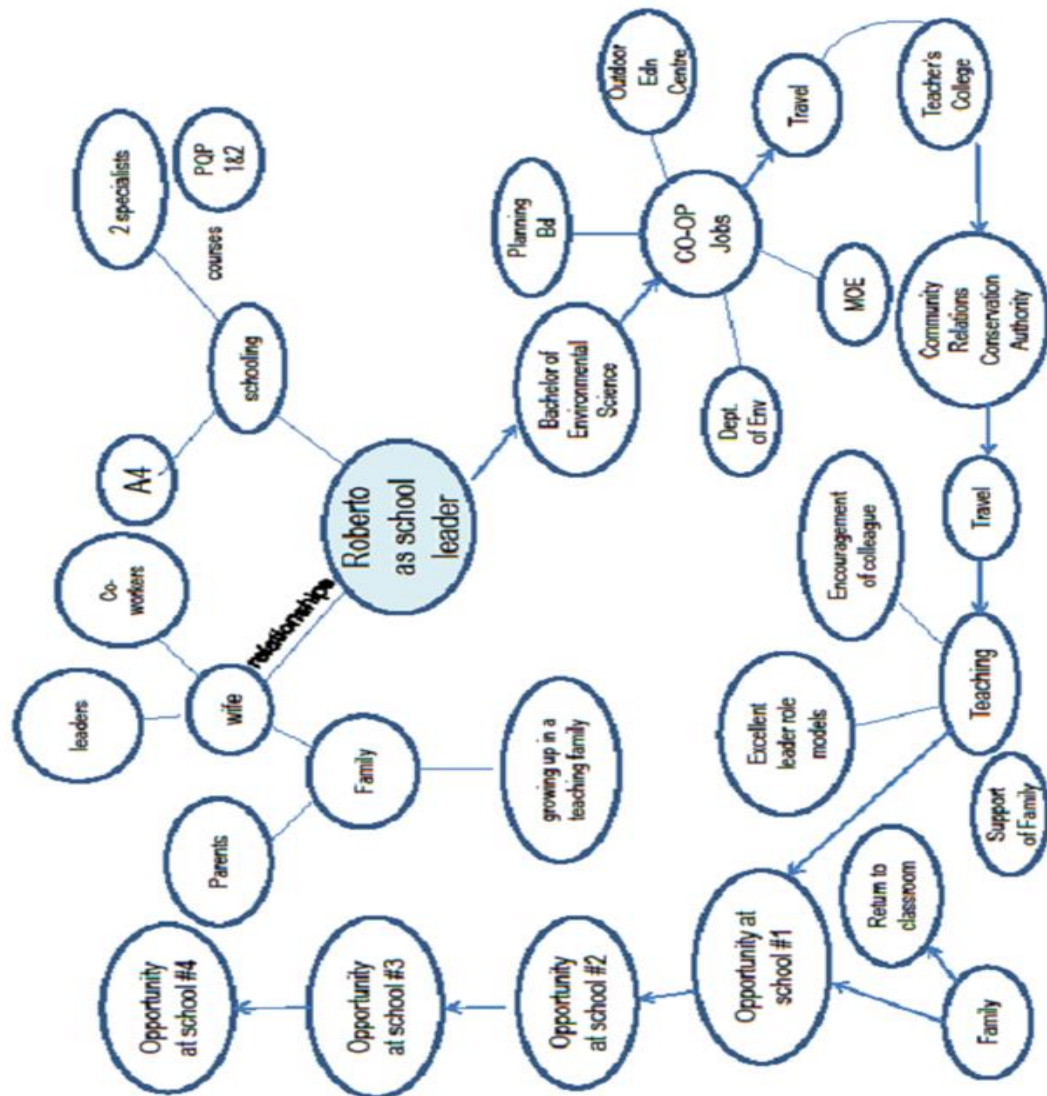


Figure 3: Mind map of what influences Roberto as a school leader

Each of these mind maps was suggestive of the leader's reflexivity—of his or her ability to think about what they were doing and why they did it with a view to moving forward. In the case of both Aganetha and Roberto, forward implied becoming a better leader inside and outside of the school.

The principals in this study acknowledged the managerial aspect of their role, yet they spoke most passionately about the curriculum and the pedagogical aspects of what was happening in their schools. However, what came through in the conversations in the Principal Learning Team was that most of the instructional leadership discussion was centred not at the level of the classroom, but at the school level. School leadership as instructional leadership hovered in the administrative realm of community and policy. The only time that I heard the principals' wealth of knowledge as instructional leaders expressed to the group occurred when I shared a dual language text with the participants. If we are to believe the leadership literature, principals will have to harness their passion for both teaching *and* building relationships to make in-roads into literacy improvement. Instructional leadership becomes *transformational leadership* (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999) when it "aspires, more generally, to increase members' efforts on behalf of the organization as well as promote more skilled practice" (p.20). In other words, when the school leader works directly with teachers and their students to share ideas and create new strategies transformation occurs.

Inherent in the literature on the role of principal as literacy leaders is the assumption that principals will be spending increased time in the classrooms with teachers and students. This sounds commonsensical in theory, but principals are restricted in their ability to spend time in classrooms on a regular, predictable basis because of the other half of the principal's role: that of principal as manager. The school manager aspect of administration must take place from the school office, far removed from the locus of literacy instruction and support. The tension between the role of the principal and where that role is located (i.e., the school office) means that the literacy leader must

impact literacy practices at the school level, well outside of the classroom. As a result, while principals might implement school level changes, without the principal present as the instructional leader there is limited change at the level of classroom practice. The practicality of being able to influence classroom practice while responding to the managerial requirements of the role is discussed in the next section.

4.4 Theme two: Principals' views of literacy

With the increasing workload of teachers and the constant threat of policy fragmentation, principals and their staffs need to have a clear sense of how their own programs relate to the whole (i.e., how their school literacy policy matches policy mandates). However, this cannot be at the expense of meeting the needs of each micro-community.

(Booth & Rowsell, 2007, p.21)

4.5 Introduction

I have labeled the study's second theme, "Principals' views of literacy", and in it I discuss several sub-themes including: how principals define literacy; policy influence from outside of the school; translating policy into support; and successful practices among the participating schools.

The school administrator has been identified in research literature (Hallinger, Bickman & Davis, 1996), government policy (Education Accountability Act, 2000), and local school system directives as being responsible for school improvement especially in relation to increased scores on large scale assessments of reading and writing within the province of Ontario. Many of the "high yield strategies" (Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2008) focus on reading and writing using prescribed strategies that align with those shown to result in improved test scores. To reach the reading targets set by system and government officials, principals must enact these mandates. In contrast, to recognize

and support the literacies of the children from a minoritized culture (e.g., the Low German-speaking Mennonites), school leaders must recognize and support literacies from a “widened lens” (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004). These two antithetical approaches to literacy must be ameliorated by principals as instructional leaders: the need for improving test scores balanced with supporting literacy learning. Principals must understand what literacy is, know how to recognize it in their school and in the classrooms, and know how to support classroom literacy practices that are defined as “best practices” by the system and government policies while at the same time being able to ameliorate what they are seeing with what they are to be observing. It is important, therefore, that principals possess a definition of literacy.

4.6 How principals define literacy

In this study, I gathered principals’ definitions of literacy from their contributions in the Principals’ Learning Team meetings, their stated beliefs about language learning from semi-structured interviews, and from my observation of the literacy practices that were evident in the schools of the participating principals. The findings indicate that the administrators hold a range of definitions of literacy from that of school literacy defined by Purcell-Gates et al. (2004) as, “the literacy that is taught, measured and valued” (p. 66) to a view of literacy as social and cultural practice.

I begin with examples from the data of principals’ definitions of literacy as school literacy: a perspective that is consistent with Street’s (1984) autonomous model wherein literacy is defined as a discrete set of disconnected skills that can be taught in similar ways across a variety of contexts (Purcell-Gates, Anderson, Gagne, Jang, Lenters, & McTavish, 2012). Roberto’s comment about the teachers in his building being

concerned about curriculum coverage describes an autonomous perspective. He relates how, “[the teachers] focused on curriculum or focused on you know these are the things that I have to accomplish. So . . . I think that’s always in the back of your mind I guess. Gee I got to get through this curriculum.” In being caught up with notions of the provincial language curriculum as a document dictating what lessons should be presented, principals’ definitions of literacy also become aligned with provincial mandates.

Catarina’s definition of literacy focuses on print literacy and she promotes her perspective within a context where government policy makers and school district senior administration insist on increased reading scores. In response to my question of what is literacy, Catarina replied:

Literacy is in your face. That’s what I want when you walk into this building. I want you to see literacy. I want you to see children’s writing. That’s what our school goal is all about. Our school goal will be mounted up there and the school-wide strategies that we’re doing. I talk about it in our newsletter . . . I take [parents] to the Ministry [of Education] sites. I add things to the newsletter [writing games, vocabulary, and phonological awareness] that I did just cut and paste from the Ministry site.

In Catarina’s school, the school goal of writing prescribes the way in which literacy is defined. Classroom ready materials that supported this “one way flow of prescriptivist knowledge” (Pennycook, 1989, p.596) are readily obtainable through the Ministry of Education and EQAO websites. These documents represent another attempt by the

policymakers and government outside of the school to keep classroom practice aligned with Ministry goals.

The principals in this study frequently referred to mandates from EQAO and the Ministry. Locally, they had been introduced to techniques such as the “walk-through” through the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. *The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-Through* (2004) is a technique used to monitor classroom instruction. “Walk-throughs” were a way for the school leaders in this study to visit a classroom. By scanning the walls, observing the teaching environment and listening to the interaction between the teacher and the students they were able to monitor the instruction in the school in a short amount of time. The principals reported that the charts and materials put on display by the teachers and students were a necessary reminder for the school leaders of what had been addressed in the classroom. In the same way, the “school goal” was posted in each classroom and in the hallways as a constant reminder of how an aspect of school literacy – a school wide sub-skill from the EQAO assessment - would be addressed by every person in the building to raise the scores in that particular area. In Catarina and Roberto’s schools, I observed the posted school goal, and in those schools the target was an aspect of school literacy as measured by EQAO. The government decree to increase scores was clear: the announced target was 75% of twelve-year-olds at Level three or above by 2008 (EQAO Annual Report, 2004, p.1). Lily, in her position as a system principal, explains the rationale for the posted school goals and the stringent mandates from the system and Ministry:

I sometimes sense that perhaps in the past our policies have been, or our expectations of schools, meaning principals and teachers, have been too

invitational and perhaps that's why our [EQAO] scores are not where we'd like them to be. And so because we feel we have been too invitational, now we're going to mandate it.

Classroom walk-throughs were designed to help principals ensure that the teacher's classroom instruction is aligned with Ministry goals. Mandated school goals in writing and reading were posted as evidence that the school had a plan to increase its EQAO scores. Each of the principals in the study had a School Improvement Plan that was based on perceived system deficits in school literacy as measured by the provincial EQAO assessment. It appeared from the data that the principals were encouraged by sources beyond the school to align their definitions of literacy with the Ministry of Education through the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat.

The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat along with the Ontario Ministry of Education have created the School Effectiveness Framework (2012; see Appendix B) as a way of measuring the compliance of schools in implementing policy mandates and resources. From the conversation among the principal participants in the study, the school visit is viewed as an important aspect of the role of principal. Each principal wanted their school to be seen as a "good school" by the visiting team (Field notes, 21 Sept. 2011). The school visit is also viewed by some of the school leaders in this study as an attempt to align Ontario schools with the "best practices" for school improvement. However, as described by Catarina, the school review also requires a great deal of extra work collating all of the materials required by the team prior to its visit. At the time of our interview, Catarina was preparing for her school review by a system team comprised of other principals and school board officials who completed a walk-through of the

school. Using a complex checklist, with items for review that are in part selected by the host principal (Appendix H) the review team scoured the school, visiting classrooms; speaking with students, parents and other community stakeholders; reviewing student and school goal-setting, EQAO scores, and school-wide practices to accumulate evidence of the school's position related to the "best practices" (in teaching literacy and in creating a school culture) as mandated by the School Effectiveness Framework. Suggestions from the EQAO for improvement in school reading and writing were made to the principal who in turn shared the recommended "Next Steps" with the school staff. This process aligns with the school improvement literature (see Reeves, 2006; Schmoker, 2006) that was shared by the EQAO training team with system school administrators. The message was clear: "it is critical that principals make school improvement a priority and that they convey the message to the staff" (Hulley & Dier, 2005, p. 70). School reviews were only one way in which the influence of the Education Quality and Accountability Office had extended its reach from its origin as the province-wide assessment in Grade 3 (Primary) and Grade 6 (Junior) Reading, Writing and Mathematics into the daily operation of schools.

The impending review influenced much of what Catarina terms "literacy work". Her definition of literacy relates directly to the school goal of writing, and she points to the latest school newsletter that includes information about writing on the front page, and special EQAO strategy updates for JK - Grade 3 and Grades 4 - 6 (Field notes, 14 Oct. 2011). As we toured her school prior to the review she proudly indicated the bulletin board outside each classroom. "I am looking for cross-curricular writing", she said, "These aren't for art". Catarina went on to narrate how she ordered, painted and mounted

borders on each bulletin board prior to the start of school. She wanted teachers to view the bulletin board as an important way to share the children's work with an audience and to demonstrate writing in connection with another subject area. In our conversation I also noted Catarina's use of the terms "high yield strategies" and "best practices" - terms that have been introduced and reinforced by EQAO as administrator "speak" around school improvement (Field notes 14 Oct. 2013). The labels are used as part of the administrator discourse. The same terms are found as labels on podcasts in the LNS archive. Here, just a click away, many administrators find material related to school improvement and literacy strategies to share during staff meetings.

The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat figured prominently in discussions with the principals. As EQAO's professional development arm, the LNS has created audio, video and print resources that highlight those practices that will move schools from "Good to Great" (Collins, 2001 as cited by EQAO, 2006) on the provincial assessment. Archived at the Curriculum Services Canada web site, these materials are available to teachers, principals and school boards to assist with their school improvement planning. Such good-to-great strategies were mandated in the school system in 2007 and included school practices like SMART (specific, manageable, achievable, resource-supported, and time-targeted) goal setting, and School Improvement Planning. Classroom strategies included the implementation of a hundred-minute literacy block and daily guided reading (Literacy & Numeracy Secretariat, 2007, p. 4). Principals learned "lessons" from "Turn-around Schools" (i.e., those schools in which significant improvement in student achievement was required and achieved) that incorporated, "aligning the standard operating procedures of the school with the overall goal of significantly improving

student literacy” (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008, p. 4). While indications of compliance and adherence to the LNS direction were discernible in the data from other school leaders in the study, Catarina seemed to be especially vigilant. With her school review coming up, Catarina felt that it was imperative that literacy in her school was “in your face”. She describes the ways in which literacy is foregrounded, even in cross-curricular projects. “So math wound up with writing. I put a bulletin board up for each teacher...but it’s not about art. It’s about some kind of connection to literacy”. In the case of Catarina’s school, this year literacy was equated with “writing” (Field note 21 Sept. 2011). However, a similar focus on school literacy (e.g., writing and reading) was not echoed by the principals from neighbouring schools in the study.

The school closest in proximity to Catarina’s school is Roberto’s where the literacy focus is more about language as a tool for communication. Roberto is the sole administrator in a school with a mix of rural, town, and LGM families. Unlike Catarina, his definition of literacy encompasses more than just writing:

It’s the ability to communicate whether it’s in numbers or words. I think that for each person here in the school system, we think of literacy as being English - your ability to communicate in English whether it’s writing, reading or orally.

However, in my mind, literacy is the ability to communicate in whatever language it is. In this school you have all the Low German speaking folk and I think you have to validate their ability to communicate – their level of literacy.

Roberto’s definition is more about language as a communication tool and the ways in which language can be represented (written, orally, numerically). He comments that the

purpose of literacy - to communicate - must, by necessity, “encompass more than just English”.

Roberto and Catarina have attended the same training sessions, received the same memos, and are responsible to the same Ministry policies. Yet, their definitions of literacy differ in important ways. I went back to the data to search for another pattern, another influence that could be found in the conversations of the principals that could impact how principals view literacy. While all of the administrator participants shared professional Discourse communities (e.g., school system, administrators) where Ministry and system mandates were presented, the school leaders were also members of individual school Discourse communities that were comprised of the staff and parents in their schools as well as of the surrounding neighbourhood. Could the influence of school Discourse shape the school leader’s definition of literacy so directly? If the impact of the community is so significant as to be one of the factors that differentiates principals’ views of literacy in spite of their participation in role related groups (i.e., the school system, and the other principals), might the school Discourse community be the most influential in a principal’s definition of literacy? In the study, there were two principals who were no longer school leaders. Aganetha is a retired administrator now pursuing graduate work in school policy, and Lily holds a system position as supervisor for language. I examine their definitions of literacy in relation to the Discourse communities in which they participate.

In her role as a system principal, Lily is bombarded by Ministry memos, system directives, and Board plans for school improvement. Her literacy Discourse community is not only that of school-based administrators, but is also that of the executive level of

the Board, and the Ministry of Education. As the “face” of the large, local school board, Lily’s definition of literacy is consistent with the direction set by the system. Lily’s role with the school board often involves participating in Ministry of Education training initiatives, and planning the ways in which the key messages from the government will be shared back with the school board. There may be no one more aware of the emphasis placed on school literacy, and the pressure to improve student learning than Lily. She believes that:

there are different kinds of literacy . . . but to be literate is to be able to cope, to have the skills--the knowledge and the skills to be able to function and to cope . . . I hesitate to say be successful because that’s something that each of us needs to measure. But literacy is a vehicle, is the means toward being able to function today and tomorrow.

As a system literacy leader, Lily’s definition is about having the knowledge, using skills and being “successful”, a definition that echoes much of the Ministry focus on improvement and graduate outcomes (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). However, many of the school leaders in the study had definitions of literacy that were echoes of the influence of their Discourse communities (i.e., school board and administrative), as well as the impact of the local school community. Some principals like Catarina, who led in areas with lower numbers of LGM families were less inclusive of literacy practices beyond the school walls. Alternatively, Roberto took into account the number of families that had a variety of languages at their disposal to use to communicate. His definition was a reflection of communicative competence. The principals’ definitions of literacy were also formed within a climate of the increased accountability of school principals for

the performance of their school, and in Lily's case of the system, on the EQAO assessment. The exception was Aganetha. As a retired principal, she is no longer focused on school improvement, school reviews, and EQAO. Aganetha's definition of literacy differs significantly from that of her colleagues and from the Board Discourse community.

Aganetha is now a graduate student. Her Discourse community has changed appreciably from when she was an administrator and she is no longer accountable to Board and Provincial policy to which Catarina must still be. The data from the PLT indicates the power of the administrative Discourse community. The principals' talk cultivates and perpetuates a definition of literacy that is determined by the senior levels of administrative community for the school board. Thomas, Tina, and Catarina--all experienced and active principals--raised the topics during the PLT discussions of EQAO, school improvement, and strategies for the English Language Learners during the assessment. Aganetha is now able to examine literacy from a much different perspective than some of her colleagues. Retired from school administration and now engaged in graduate work Aganetha's definition gives greater attention to the social practice and social interaction aspects of literacy:

Think about the written word . . . it dominates everything we do. It definitely puts constraints on opportunities, on jobs and is valued by society. There is an oral aspect to it as well. It seems obvious when you speak with people if they have been immersed in literacy. You make judgments about whether they are rich or poor, or about how far they've gone in school, or about the kind of people they are . . . there are so many judgments attached. I think about how I communicate

with people and how they communicate with me. It has a lot to do with relationships and about ‘putting people in boxes’.

Aganetha has foregrounded her own childhood experience as a newcomer immigrant to create a definition of literacy that is far reaching--well beyond the walls of the classroom and of school.

In the above section, I have narrated a possible way in which principals’ definitions of literacy supplant even important messages from the government within their schools. Literacy as *school literacy* has been the message consistently transmitted to provincial school systems by LNS and EQAO through workshops and materials for use by teachers and school leaders, and direction from system principals like Lily. However, Roberto’s definition of literacy indicates that the reading and writing focus may not be unfailingly apparent in the school and classroom practices of the participating schools, and that the local school Discourse community has an impact on how literacy is viewed.

The next section uses examples from the data to identify the policies from outside of the school that could influence principals’ definitions of literacy.

4.7 Policy influence from outside the school

To respond to my question, “What influences how a principal leads a school community?” I examined the regional effects in the form of school leaders’ participation in system and administrative Discourse communities. I have shared several of the principals’ definitions of literacy in the previous section – from Catarina’s more “school literacy” focus, to a socially constructed view held by Aganetha. Additionally, I

discussed the role of the school Discourse community in shaping how the school leader defines literacy. This was emphasized in Robert's definition of literacy when he took into account the varied languages that are used by his students and their families to communicate. However, the study also found that the principals made repeated references to the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS), EQAO, and system mandates. These governmental influences had a presence in the literacy practices that were enacted within classrooms. In the next section, I discuss exactly how a provincial assessment, created hundreds of kilometres away from the schools in which it is enacted, was present in the literacy practices in local classrooms as discussed by principals. Present in the comments of the principals is the perceived influence that EQAO has on the teaching of Low German-speaking Mennonite children.

4.7.1 EQAO

Many of the administrators in the research referred to system (Board) policy and Ministry policy (specifically those of LNS and EQAO) when discussing what literacy “looked like” in a school. While structures in place at the system level monitored the implementation of local mandates, EQAO communicated with principals via email and information posted on its website. With the exception of highly sensitive, personal data related to students and school particulars that are only available to the school principal using a special coded access, the remainder of the information on the website is available to the public and can be accessed at www.eqao.on.ca. This site contains examples of past assessments for use by parents and teachers (e.g., teachers can prepare students by offering posted past tests as practice). It houses the archived results from schools across the province that can be used, for example, to compare schools within and across school

boards. There is an encrypted site for each school accessible only to the principal and the Board that contains the results of each of the assessments written at Grade 3 and Grade 6 since the inception of the assessment. Finally, there are special areas for teachers and administrators that offer strategies on how to raise the student scores on the annual assessment.

Each student who sits the EQAO assessment in Grades 3 and 6 is engaging in a literacy event (Heath, 1983). However, learning how to sit the assessment, rehearsing test-taking strategies, and responding to similar style questions are literacy practices. During one of the PLT meetings, the discussion turned to Low German-speaking Mennonite students, the EQAO assessment, and the school literacy practice of test preparation. In other schools, the annual teaching of “how to do well on EQAO” has reached the status of a literacy event (Teresa, field notes). The LGM are a transnational group migrating between Mexico and southwestern Ontario, and many LGM students are absent from school for a large part of the academic year. Teresa voiced the challenges for Mennonite students posed by the EQAO in relation to this absence and the students’ difficulty with reading instructions, and responding in writing to questions in English. Teresa views this annual assessment as an additional, taught curriculum (Cuban, 1995) when she states:

I think that if we didn’t have EQAO, we would be very happy. What happens is that the kids come in, and the kids come out, and every year about now we get a bunch back, or we will get more, and they haven’t had any practice since school in October in EQAO, you know what I mean because they don’t fit any of the criteria to exempt . . . a lot of them know enough that they have to write it but, I

am going to use the word discouraging—it is discouraging . . . teachers work so hard and all of a sudden two kids show up two weeks before [the test] and now they are on EQAO.

Teresa is voicing her frustration that the LGM children haven't been in class to participate in the literacy practice of test taking, thereby further positioning these students as at risk for doing poorly on the assessment. Further, she expresses the feelings of the classroom teachers as the LGM students arrive shortly before the administration of EQAO and they are in a different place “on EQAO” preparation. Teresa is not the only administrator who voices frustration with the provincial assessment.

The value that school administrators place on learning how to *do* EQAO, thereby creating and perpetuating the assessment as a literacy practice, further narrows the definition of literacy. The focus of EQAO is school literacy (i.e., reading and writing) using only pencil and paper. For children from the LGM for whom their first language is not written nor read, written tests provide an additional challenge: responding in writing, in a second or even third language. David laments the fact that the EQAO assessment has become such a pervasive aspect of the school year. You can hear the resignation in his voice:

How can one EQAO test fit everybody? It is not the way that most teachers teach their kids—not at all. You only tamper with somebody's ability to show what they know and you also create an atmosphere that is tense for students and staff. [This is September and] we still think about EQAO. We wrote it in June and we'll be thinking about it all year. Even if you had great results, you are thinking, 'okay, that's fine, but what about next year'. We have got to stop going down!

In his quote, David has highlighted several important points about how EQAO dominates how schools think about literacy in terms of scores (i.e., “we have got to stop going down”), and the ways in which classroom literacy practice has been shaped by a governmental assessment (i.e., “it’s not the way that most teachers teach their kids”). What began in the 1990s as a two week assessment of reading, writing, and mathematics has evolved into a year-long literacy practice as teachers instruct students on test-taking strategies.

As Roberto and the other principals attest, EQAO has wormed its way into the school by taking on the status of a school literacy practice when it was originally an annual assessment. The school board adheres to the LNS suggested “best practices” to improve students’ performance on EQAO. Lily and her board level team hold workshops for teachers on how to incorporate aspects of EQAO assessment (e.g., using bubble responses in multiple choice, reiterating the question at the beginning of a written response, and using highlighters to signify key words in a question) into their daily classroom practice (Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat). It is an expectation by both the school board and the Ministry that the “best practices” from the highest scoring schools in the province on EQAO will be implemented into every classroom. Several principals in the study report that The Ontario Curriculum expectations for Language have almost been circumvented by instruction in test taking strategies, how to give a Level Four response (the top score on the rubric), and using instructional time to practise using past assessments, and review exemplars with students. These practices have been reported to administrators at EQAO result workshops by the Board as representative of strategies used in “Lighthouse schools” (those schools designated by EQAO as having significantly

improved) to increase reading and writing scores. Now EQAO preparation is part of expected *best practice*. From her time as a school principal in a large school, with a high population of English Language Learners (ELL), Aganetha recalls how her teachers felt that they were “stealing time” to focus on EQAO. She shared with the PLT participants that:

It seems all about passing the test! There is a whole regime of teaching a certain way and concern about progress and whether children will get ahead. It is reflective of looking at kids before the test as a deficit model. The teachers’ anxiety increases because the kids in class don’t fit the practices they want to use.

EQAO preparation may help to increase the reading and writing scores for some students. However, rather than broaden the spectrum of approaches to literacy as multiliteracies, EQAO preparation reinforces a very narrow view of literacy. The provincial school improvement focus hallmarked by EQAO scores is translated at the school board level into system goals. From that tier, pressure is put on each school to improve its scores and to be accountable for the strategies that are used to achieve that goal. Principals in this study remarked that the ways in which Board level supports can be accessed to improve student learning are very narrow (Field notes 28 August 2011). Specifically, to qualify for itinerant English as a Second Language support, students need to be positioned as deficit learners (i.e., students who struggle with reading and writing in English) according to a government definition that highlights country of origin and language spoken at home (Board level policy). For the school leaders in this study, those students were the Low German-speaking Mennonites.

4.8 Translating policy into support

In terms of support for English Language Learners, Ontario policy mandates many program outcomes but does not dictate how, or at which level (e.g., local, board, province) these supports are created and enacted.

4.8.1 System level support

The principals report that classroom teachers desperately seek more time from English as a Second Language (ESL) support assigned from the system to help the LGM students learn to read and write in English. Catarina reported that the teachers in her school see the alignment between school and EQAO as being “all about reading and writing”. She described how her teachers struggle to assist children newly arrived from Mexico or Manitoba adapt to the school and classroom atmosphere of an Ontario public school. Catarina related the story of a Grade 2 teacher who had purchased crayons and scissors, and sent extra paper home with the students to practice printing their name and the alphabet. Another teacher was using the PLT-created dual language text in English and Low German. However, because of the relatively few LGM families in her school as compared with other schools with similar populations in the area, the ESL support assigned to Catarina’s is that of an occasional, system itinerant, ESL teacher as opposed to a staff member whose time could be devoted to supporting ELL.

In the southwestern Ontario school board in this study, the deployment of ESL support transpires in a traditional, economically-efficient manner (Markus, 2011). The system utilizes a formula to allocate resources to each school that requires the tracking of individual students’ country of birth, years in Canada, first language and language(s)

spoken at home and English proficiency as scored by Levels of Proficiency (a tool that subjectively tracks student use of reading, writing, and oral communication in English). While this model for allocating resources may appear straight-forward, it is not clear-cut when assessing LGM students. The model does not make allowances for those students whose home language is Low German even though they were born in Ontario or Canada. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education support document, *Many Roots, Many Voices* (2005), the Low German-speaking Mennonites are mentioned specifically along with First Nations groups as being from a special category of Canadian born, English Language Learners (ELL) (p.48). However board allocation of resources for ELL doesn't differentiate between those children for whom English is a second language but who have experience with literacy in another language or have attended school in another country and the particular needs of Canadian born ELL. Further, LGM students fall within the Ontario Ministry definition of ELD (English Language Development; <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/esleldprograms/esleldprograms.pdf>) that recognizes the often limited amount of schooling that LGM children have had before arriving in Ontario. The system formula continues to be applied in the way in which it always has to the detriment of the LGM students.

From the principals' stories it would appear that the most common model of ESL delivery is for the itinerant ESL teacher to visit one school in the morning, and another in the afternoon, withdrawing from class those children who have been identified as needing language help. The English Language Learners (ELL) are grouped into clusters according to their language proficiency as assessed on a system created profile that is completed by the individual school ESL teacher. The ESL teacher works with the

students to develop English language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. As discussed in an earlier chapter, Low German is primarily a spoken language that has only recently had emphasis placed on its written form (e.g., translating the Bible into Low German). Thus, as discovered by Roberto:

many of these [LGM] children have never seen their language written down.

They don't recognize, 'that's a word' and they don't have any context to look at in English to say, 'Okay, so this is what it should look like or sound like'.

He and several other principal participants realize that as a result of the uniqueness of LGM literacies, traditional approaches to working with ESL children require modification. Where other cultures usually have a written L_1 to use as a framework when learning English, the LGM must rely on spoken languages (both Low German and English). However, a language learning environment where discussion and explanation, gesture and pointing, speaking and listening, supersede the use of reading and writing is not a classroom setting where the focus is on school literacy (i.e., reading and writing). Therefore the classroom teachers from the schools in this study rely heavily on the withdrawal of the LGM students by the ESL teacher to build the English language repertoire of the Mennonite ELLs (Roberto, field note, 16 August 2011).

The Ontario Ministry of Education, by virtue of the Education Act, controls the amount of school board budget allocated for staffing by a count of students in school at the end of October and again in March. Many families from the Low German-speaking Mennonite population are transnational, leaving Ontario for Mexico in the fall and returning to Ontario seasonal farm work in the spring. The ESL staff allocated to schools is predicated on the budget from the Ministry to the school board using the student count

dates of October 31st and March 31st of each year. The migration of the LGM often occurs between these dates, and as a result classes are often oversubscribed but there is no additional allotment of ESL teachers. Teresa elaborates on the challenge of having LGM children arrive after the official count dates:

This winter we had a lot of families stay [and not go to Mexico]. We also had kids registered who had been home-schooled. We had a whole bunch of new families and no more ESL help so it was frustrating . . . frustrating to teachers and children.

Several of the principals communicated that the support of the ESL teachers from the program department as instrumental to the success of the LGM students in their school. The withdrawal of students into smaller groups facilitates greater access to teacher attention and must be reassuring for non-English speaking students. However, there is a huge concern among teachers and principals alike about what happens when the child leaves the supportive ESL environment and returns to the regular classroom. In a classroom of thirty students, the several who are Low German speakers require other kinds of support that is often not readily available.

4.8.2 School level support

There are often other supports within the local school environment that principals reported were put into place to assist LGM students. As has been discussed, the itinerant ESL assistance is welcome. However, the child's school day is six hours long. Itinerant ESL personnel are only available for a small portion of the school day. Principals described their scramble to support teachers who are working with these non-English speaking children for long periods of time in their classrooms (Field note 28 August

2011). In order to support a reading and writing (school literacy) perspective of literacy learning, principals searched for resources to offer to the staff. “Letter of the Day” pre-primer style reading worksheets and other similar consumables were sought by Catarina for her teachers. These resources were copied by the classroom teacher to help them to modify regular program language expectations for the LGM students. However, these “Colouring Curriculum” type activities are not effective in supporting English Language Learners (ELL) in a new language (Olsen, 2010). According to Krashen (1981/2002) and others included in the literature review, what is needed is the provision of using a first language to support the acquisition of a second, in this case, English.

In response to the need for appropriate language resources articulated by the principals in the PLT, the members of the PLT created reproducible materials for the Low German-speaking Mennonites in their schools with the help of a local Mennonite teenager who translated the material into Low German. Catarina recounts how she shared one of the new dual-language texts that used Low German. While the teacher was grateful for the resource she came back and told the principal that, “the kids didn’t know how to read the Low German either because it’s not a written language”. The teacher hadn’t tried to use the text as a pattern and have the child make a book, or take photos of things so that the child could match the Low German and the English words, or even have the child use the pictures in the book and tell the story using his first language of Low German thereby creating a form of syncretic literacy (Gregory, 2008). Instead, Catarina lamented, the photocopied book was used only as a story, and the reading activity was reduced to having the child colour the pictures. The other principals immediately chimed in with their experiences of using the dual language texts that had

been created by the PLT. Several leaders, including Keith, Don and Roberto, shared ideas for other ways in which the stories could be used by teachers. Some of these suggestions are listed in Chapter Six.

In addition to a lack of print resources, the study also identified a potential dearth of Low German-speaking staff in the schools. When principals listed the number of Low German speakers that were available to help students and families, their list comprised three teachers, one custodian, and one secretary among seven schools. There aren't many LGM personnel available to help the LGM children acclimatize to a new learning situation in a new language. Further, if administrators were only to draw from school personnel in search of Low German speakers, that LGM individual would have to have either have left the LGM community in order to pursue higher learning or be a member of the LGM community employed in a role other than as teaching staff (e.g., teaching assistants, lunchroom supervisors). Because Old Colony children rarely attend school beyond the age of fourteen (Hedges, 1996), many graduates work at manual jobs that do not require a recognized high school diploma. Few would be employed within a school setting. Additionally, the requirement for a diploma is coupled with a bias in the community. The Low German language is spoken only with other LGM and not used as a language of communication with those outside the group, which would have to be *English*. In one school in this study there was a Low German speaking staff member who hadn't identified herself to former administrators because, as she said to her principal, "[I didn't tell them] because my own experience at school as a Mexican Mennonite wasn't a positive thing" (Catarina, personal communication, October 14, 2011). It quickly became

apparent that principals need to search beyond the walls of the school to find ways to welcome and support LGM students and families.

4.9 Successful practices among the participating schools

Over the course of several meetings, and following the realization by the administrators that Low German-speaking personnel were lacking in schools, the PLT discussions started to include successful school literacy and cultural practices for welcoming LGM families. The idea sharing was prompted by suggestions for ways in which administrators who did not have access to Low German-speaking staff members could seek help from local Mennonite agencies, families whose children had been in the school for several years, or other LGM who were well-known in the community. In sharing promising practices within their individual schools, much of the conversation among the principals centred on ways to include Low German speakers, both students and parents, and accommodate their language(s). Models from another school district were shared with the administrators including this suggestion from Carolina:

The way it worked when I was on staff was that we had an ESL classroom, and then there was the Help Centre--which is kind of like the MCC [Mennonite Central Committee]--so people could come and drop-in, and get help with their paperwork and what not. But then the local high school rented a room out of that as a transition base from the ESL program at the elementary school to a high school program because the Old Colony parents weren't allowing [the students] to go to the actual high school, so it actually transitioned over. So it was Grade 6, 7 and 8. Some of the kids were back and forth between elementary school and high

school. A number of years ago [the Board] was able to get a grant for a designation as a Mennonite School and they were able to reinstate some of the things that the culture found important--bringing in the Lord's Prayer, and having a scripture lesson each day and that kind of thing. So some of the children who were lost to the public schools and who were going to private Mennonite schools because of a lack of respect for the Christian faith that they hold dear we gained those kids back into the ESL program.

The ability to have special provisions: a school designated as a Mennonite School; and where the Lord's Prayer is heard on the announcements at the beginning of each day as a hallmark of the faith of the children attending the school, seems worlds away from where the principals in this study saw school literacy and cultural practices in their own buildings.

Over the 18 month data collection period, the perspective of the administrators on the information shared in the PLT made a significant shift. Many of these administrators had originally looked to the PLT as a way [to] "learn about the culture" (Catarina, February 28, 2011) and then come up with "ways of making it work in our building" (David, February 28, 2011). As time went on, the sharing of the information grew beyond the structured PLT meetings and practices at individual schools, to reflective questions about personal practice, and other ways to support LGM students' literacies. Roberto discusses the impact of a PLT discussion on his views of Low German Mennonites at his school:

it was interesting because until our PLT and talking about Low German and is it spoken in the classroom or on the playground . . . it was funny because I didn't hear it. I didn't see it . . . But after that, I made a point of talking to a couple of kids and saying, 'You've got to help me out here, and give me some homework so that I can learn some Low German.' So it's good you know—the student is becoming the teacher and I think it puts Low German in a different light for the kids and the parents, hopefully. [I hear Low German] to some degree, yes, out on the playground. Maybe the kids are feeling pressure from home that they think they have to speak English in school or whatever. Or maybe it's just their practice and what they are used to. I would like to hear it in the classrooms though.

Roberto seemed to be willing to go beyond the ESL support provided by the Board to support the literacies of the LGM in his school. He incorporated the lessons that he has learned from other principals in the PLT (e.g., listening for Low German and encouraging the children to speak their first language) into his school.

In considering successful school practices, David and Keith believe that when working with Low German Mennonites, culture and literacy are woven together. Their perspective aligns with that of Padron and Knight (1990) who posit that “language and culture are so inextricably intertwined that it is often difficult to consider one without the other” (p.177). Both David and Keith, administrative partners at the largest elementary school with LGM students in the study area, recognize that meaning making in another language is about “more than English, and more than reading and writing” (Field note, 21 Sept. 2011). David is open to suggestions from members of the school staff on how to

support the Low German-speaking students. He recounted how a Low German-speaking staff member gave greetings at assemblies, over the announcements, or offered seasonal wishes in Low German. David describes the ways in which provisions for the LGM have been made in their school:

Well, we have ESL that is traditionally delivered [withdrawal], and we have[a] program that is a system class with twelve kids in a class congregated from the junior grades with a heavy emphasis on literacy and numeracy. [The teacher] tries to coordinate with the classroom teachers so that they are kind of doing similar things. She will try to organize things so that they can go on field trips with the kids and broaden their background experiences, vocabulary that sort of thing. Then there is the new program to address the needs of the ones who traditionally ended their education at Grade 8. The bugs are being worked out on that one yet as it is a system program [but] there are over a hundred students already registered. So we are trying to be culturally sensitive and inclusive so that we are a school for everybody. We say *Gooden Morjen* on the announcements in the morning as just a little add on . . . like putting those pictures up that have LGM children in them as well as our other school kids. Everybody belongs here.

Keith and David's assertion that literacy and culture are connected is a demonstration of their belief that meaning making goes beyond school literacy--beyond reading and writing in English.

4.10 Summary

From the data, the definitions of literacy that the principals offered most often were related to school literacy and the print literacy skills of reading and writing as defined by the provincial curriculum and monitored by the EQAO assessment. The school leaders were influenced by government policies and mandates as evidenced by the extent of the preparation by Catarina for her school review as part of the School Effectiveness Framework (2012). Use of vocabulary such as “best practices”, “good to great”, and “high yield strategies” that originated in the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS), is now part of the school discourse on literacy and school improvement. While the LNS operates at arms-length from the Ministry of Education, it works in tandem with the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). The archived podcasts and support materials created by LNS help to further the definition of literacy as school literacy as inferred from video clips of “best” classroom practice in reading and writing (see <http://resources.curriculum.org/secretariat/snapshots/primaryliteracy.html>). Principals can find executive summaries that outline the practices that are expected by boards to help raise the test scores of the children in their schools (see Board Improvement for Student Achievement <http://resources.curriculum.org/secretariat/bipsa/>).

The purpose of these supports is overt and stated clearly in regard to the Ministry of Education’s target of 75% of twelve-year-olds at Level 3 or higher in reading as assessed by EQAO. Teresa, Thomas, David and Keith questioned the EQAO testing parameters and the rules that limited the ways in which LGM students could participate (PLT, 28 February 2011). The formula through which system ESL resources are allocated in ways that disadvantage schools with large LGM student populations was

lamented specifically by the principals with large numbers of LGM students who require support. Interestingly however, while classroom strategies that support LGM students were mentioned, the focus of the school leaders was related to their work in managing system expectations to increase reading scores, reviewing school-wide literacy practices, and successfully working with the Low German Mennonite community.

In this chapter, I presented the expressed challenges and concerns of the administrators as they work to support reading and writing (i.e., school literacy) with the Low German-speaking Mennonite students in their schools. I shared the extent to which the local school Discourse--the impact of the school neighbourhood-- influenced how principals define literacy. While the principals shared some of what they have learned from their students about LGM literacies, this area has not yet been examined in this study. Chapter Five takes the reader beyond the walls of the school to examine the principals' understandings of the school community that they lead, in particular their understanding of the home literacy practices of the Low German speaking Mennonite families.

5. Chapter Five

“Language and culture are so inextricably intertwined that it is often difficult to consider one without the other”.

(Padron & Knight, 1990, p. 177)

5.1 Theme three: Principals’ understanding of the Low German-speaking Mennonite community

5.1.1 Introduction

The final theme that I identified from the research data is that of principals’ understandings of the Low German-speaking Mennonite (LGM) community and addresses the research question, “what influences how a principal leads a school community”? In this chapter I examine four sub-themes including: the principals’ understanding of LGM culture; faith-based education; using Low German as a bridge between cultures; and the need for cultural proficiency on the part of school leaders. In this section, my examination of the principals’ understanding of the LGM community from the data culminates in the unveiling of several resources and strategies that were created by the principals in the Principal Learning Team. These resources and strategies were used by the principals within their schools to address the gaps that they identified in their current school practice during the PLT discussions. Examples of the resources are located in Appendices I and J.

In order to lead effectively, a school principal must not only be aware of but also build a relationship with the surrounding community (Fiore, 2011; Ontario Leadership Framework, 2012). In the case of the principals in this study, the local community was comprised not only of members from the predominant western culture, but also from the Low German-speaking Mennonite community. Learning about the LGM culture can be

challenging as the LGM are often quite closed when dealing with “English” (anyone who is non-Mennonite). However the dichotomy of one child in two different countries, in two different schools, with two different school lives in one calendar year was a reality for the principals in this study. Therefore in order to address the *literac(ies)* of the children in their schools, good leadership--as defined through the Ontario Leadership Framework--requires principals to cultivate an understanding of the school community.

5.2 Principals’ understanding of the LGM culture

The principal both leads and is influenced by the school community (i.e., the families who live in the neighbourhood around the school and the students who attend the school; Ryan, 2002). In this study, the school board is a large, southwestern Ontario system that encompasses both urban and rural settings, and is comprised of very diverse school communities. Because of the size of the local system, principals are able to spend an entire career in only one school area (e.g., those schools whose students generally attend the same secondary school) or in schools from only one demographic. As a result, if principals are moved out of one school jurisdiction and into another, they need to become familiar with the school community. The research findings demonstrate that the principals new to working with LGM were not offered either resources or support to become familiar with the complexities of this cultural group. As an experienced principal within the system, Catarina had led both urban and rural schools albeit in another jurisdiction. When she arrived as the administrator of a school in the area of the study, Catarina was unfamiliar with the Low German-speaking Mennonites. During one PLT meeting, Catarina candidly remarked:

I didn't know anything about this culture . . . I have been with this school system my entire career and I didn't know anything about them until it was right in my face . . . So I didn't know anything, and I started to do some research on my own and I couldn't find *anything*.

When she took it upon herself to find out more about the LGM culture she did not find any resources that could help improve her understanding or help her to support her teachers and students. The frustration in Catarina's voice was evident.

There is very little research, especially in the area of education, that is specific to the Mennonites of this cultural group, and certainly little that is current as Catarina discovered. The LGM are "the quiet in the land" (Psalm 35:20), living in the physical world but apart from its lures of temptation as quiet or peaceful neighbours. Much of what is available to the public are reports from LGM insiders directed toward those who are educating their children in parochial or committee schools and who are familiar with the Biblical underpinnings of the culture. These documents outline the parameters of the curriculum, its scriptural basis, and the Mennonite belief in the function of the school as the mechanism to bridge the teachings from the home with those of the church (e.g., classroom resources from Christian Light Enterprises). However, resources to help teachers and administrators in public schools to recognize, connect with, and understand the LGM students are rare. As Thomas and Teresa, long time educators working with LGM and residents of the local communities indicate, most of the information comes from the families or the children themselves. Thomas notes:

They are here but they don't speak up. It will take two or three more generations and then we will be having to listen to their voice a lot more than we do now.

When they start doing things, it will change the culture of the town itself.

Thomas's comment suggests that he is aware of the minoritized nature of the culture and the ways in which the LGM choose to live alongside the more dominant western culture. As the principals indicated in a PLT discussion (28 February 2011), they are cognizant of the number of families in the area who are LGM but that this phenomena is not recognized within the policies or resources from within the school system. For instance, Teresa points to the fact that the LGM are not mentioned in the recently published manual of cultures and religions that was given to all principals to support the implementation of the Ontario Ministry of Education's Equity and Inclusion in Education Policy (2009). Catarina raised the concern of several other principals who were new to the area when she asked, "without resources or information, how do principals start to connect with the community?"

At our first PLT meeting, Keith, another administrative newcomer, suggested that it was important for the administrators in the PLT to flag the assumptions that were being echoed within their schools and among their staffs. He suggested that there was a need to highlight the issues that are held in common and those that need to be addressed before moving forward with discussions of literacy. As a result, the majority of the discussion at the very first Principal Learning Team meeting served to bring forward the questions that the administrators had about the Low German-speaking Mennonites as a foundation from which to build our understanding. The conversation began with the name, "Mennonite". Again, Keith commented, "It's just like painting all of the Mennonites as being the same,

and they're not, are they? You hear Mennonite. You hear German Mennonite. You hear Mexican Mennonite as if it's almost a derogatory term." Teresa, a long time administrator responded with a critical incident to illustrate her experience at her school:

If someone is going to tell me something has happened, it is always Mexican Mennonite. It isn't German Mennonite. They just go straight to it and it is so interesting because I know if I hear that word and it is kids, then they *wanted* to be mean. Get out of here you Mexican Mennonite, you know?

In response to Teresa's experience, Roberto asked the group, "Are there some pejorative terms that are used in Low German that we don't understand?" The principals turned to me for an answer. I shared with the PLT that the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) advised us to refer to the Old Colony Mennonites in our region as Low German-speaking Mennonites and that the Mennonites refer to themselves as *dietsch*. I recall being very aware of my role as participant-observer-researcher at this point, and while I didn't want the group to build disinformation, I was cautious about the amount of backstory material that I would share so early in the research. I saw my role as that of the catalyst in the discussion, the participant/observer, data recorder, refreshment organizer, and meeting arranger. I was relieved when the PLT conversation took a different turn once the concern about naming had been addressed.

As the meeting continued, the discussion turned from assumptions about naming the LGM to questions about the traditional dress. As I had been told by both a school board attendance counselor, and again by a pastor, a tremendous amount of information can be gained by reading the text of Mennonite clothing (D. Friesen, personal

communication, March 17, 2012). For administrators, observing the clothing that an LGM student wears to school offers important clues to the orthodoxy, migration, and literacies of a child and his or her family. In reading the clothing and languages of the children, an educator is better positioned to understand about the community in which their school is situated and thus have a better understanding about the children who will be attending the school. Teresa was a seasoned administrator who had been a principal for most of her career in communities with large LGM populations. Although very familiar with the way in which the LGM children dress at her school, it didn't appear from the conversation she was having with two principals new to the area, that she understood the significance of what she was seeing--what the dress meant to the children's understanding of school and of literacy.

Teresa: The girls are still in Old Colony dress and the boys are in jeans and plaid shirts.

Roberto: The girls have these apron things on their dress. What happens in gym?

David: We have kids part in traditional dress and part not. They wear shorts under the dress. Some teachers have them sit out but I don't know if they've ever asked them [the children] if they want to do that [put shorts on].

Teresa: I see my kids in plaid shirts and blue jeans and the shoes, or whatever, and a ball hat, but then not every day.

Roberto: Yeah, that's what we have too.

Catarina: Yeah, I don't have many kids. Just the one little girl who wears the dress, but she doesn't stand out.

Teresa: Oh no! My kids stand out because they have the traditional dark green or blue dress.

From this conversation, the administrators did not yet seem able to “read” the dress of the children in their school, or the dress of the parents, as a text to offer information about the family’s background. The language(s) that the LGM speak (e.g., combinations of Low German, High German, Spanish and English) and the way in which the women and children dress offer important information about orthodoxy, migration, literacies, and schooling. I was told by another David, a former Old Colony member who is now an educator in a school with a large number of LGM children in the Manitoba public system that:

[as an administrator] you need to pick up on the language and the dress. The ones [Mennonites] that are more liberal are the ones that stayed [in Manitoba] and become the department heads of Mennonite Studies at universities. They never left, but the ones that held nearest and dearest to those aspects of their religious identity as an Old Colony Mennonite—the language and the separation of church and state—those are the ones that left. So, if they’re coming back now from wherever, it is probably safe to assume that they were adhering to a movement as close as they could to what it was that separated them from Mennonites a few hundred years ago. (D. Friesen, personal conversation, November 2011)

But where could the PLT members obtain this type of knowledge about the community in which they lead? I could offer some information that addressed the immediate concern for these administrators but my cultural overview was not a long-term solution to the lack

of resources. In the principal group, David wondered if there was a list of contacts, or if there was someone in the community that we, as a group, could speak with about our questions. Inwardly, I smile because the group has turned to each other and not to me as the “leader”. He continues,

my whole agenda right now is getting to know the players in the Mennonite community, so I had Mr. and Mrs. ----- take me around this past week to the radio station and to the community outreach centre, and to speak at MCS with ----
----- . And I went to the Thrift Store just trying to make connections.

Roberto and Catarina continue a whispered discussion with David about contacting the same couple to take them on a local tour. Simultaneously, a suggestion is made by Keith to create something as a group that could be shared among administrators who work with the same LGM demographic. Thomas added that the document could even be left at the school for a successor once the principals involved in the PLT move on to another school. Thus, the *Ute Reeka* (Reaching Out) Mennonite Primer was born as a resource for administrators created by administrators (See Appendix I).

5.2.1 By administrators, for administrators

The *Ute Reeka* Mennonite Primer, of which I was editor, became a tool for the PLT members to offer information that they had gathered about the LGM. The document quickly became a tool written by administrators with a history of working with the LGM for administrators who were new to the area and without experience in supporting LGM in their school. It became my role as editor to authenticate the information that was sent to me by PLT members and to format the document in a way that made sense for

principals to include in a binder or on a blotter. I took as a template the “Assets Map” (Price, 2011) and sorted the information as it came from the principals into general headings related to community, families, language, faith, and resources. As a tool, our finished primer was celebrated by the PLT and was in demand from others in the school system. However, several principals who helped to author the document viewed this wide-spread sharing of a local document as problematic. The distribution dilemma and its resolution are discussed further in Chapter Six.

While the *Uta Reeka* helped to address some immediate questions for the administrators there were many other cultural aspects of working with the LGM to consider, among them assumptions about literacies. Again, it was Keith who reiterated the notion of assumptions that administrators and educators held, this time in relation to culture:

Culturally we are making assumptions about these people and we just *don't know!*

We do what we think is right but so much of it goes back to assumptions because we don't have any information. It even goes back to what we are thinking about home literacies. I mean, we are making assumptions in using the word literacies, plural. I am assuming in most LGM households they wouldn't put an “ies”. It would just be the sole literacy that is being spoken.

From this excerpt I inferred that Keith understands the depth to which administrators are unaware of LGM culture. In taking as his example the concept of literacies, he shows that he understands that English is not the home literacy of the LGM culture. Whether or not the LGM themselves would pluralize literacies, it is evident from other PLT conversations (4 April 2011) that the principals are aware of the LGM's use of Low

German, Spanish, and High German. Roberto has told the group how he is being taught Low German by some students on the playground, and how there is a mother of some of the children in his school that speaks four other languages (4 April 2011). However, no one in the PLT picked up on the plurality of literacies, and regarded the spoken languages of the LGM students and their families as separate from literacy—reading and writing.

5.2.2 Sharing strategies

In an attempt to be welcoming, some administrators struggled to go beyond the written method of communication with home. David tried several different tactics:

[At my school we] intentionally do things differently because we want them [LGM] to feel included. I sent home newsletters that hit the garbage can because nobody can read them. So I took a copy to the radio and the lady talked about it in Low German on the radio.

The conversation continued with other administrators sharing communication strategies that may have worked for one situation but didn't for another.

Thomas had been quietly listening to the experiences of his colleagues, nodding in agreement and support. Because of the length of time that he has spent in schools that has large numbers of LGM families, his opinion is valued by the others and they attend closely to his counsel. He recalls:

I remember speaking at a panel like this of administrators with them [ministers and bishops] about ten years ago and one stood up and said, 'There are two things that you will have to do for us before our kids will come back to your schools. One is that you will have to let them pray, and the other is that you can't teach

sexual education.’ And we [the educators] said that we couldn’t affect that kind of change. The bishop responded, ‘Well then, you won’t get our kids’. And that was the end of that. We never had another meeting.

The room went silent as each administrator reflected on the importance, and magnitude of Thomas’ remark. Roberto broke the silence and mused:

So while it would initially appear the language is the barrier to the communication with and potentially inclusion of LGM students into public schools, it is really about faith and how do we address that concern in public schools? We know that some families would rather attend [the fee paying Mennonite school] but can’t afford it. How can we compensate?

Again, the principals were silent. It appeared that no one in the group had a strategy to share—or at least a strategy that had been met with success from both inside the LGM community and inside the school.

5.3 Faith-based education, assimilation and inclusion

My own administrative practice when I worked with LGM students and their families was based on my own experiments, ideas, mistakes, and successes. One area around which I learned a great deal was in honouring LGM traditions around the religious holidays and the differences that exist for LGM from other Christian cultures. While Christmas is observed it is not as important for the LGM as Easter and Pentecost when the adult baptism of new members of the church takes place. Because I was invited to a number of spring weddings of former pupils, I discovered that this time of the year is also “wedding season” when most of the newly baptized adults marry in the Old Colony,

Rhineland, and Sommerfelder congregations. These details I absorbed from spending time with members of the LGM community: asking respectful questions, speaking with the children at school, and getting to know the parents and families. One example from my experience was the oversight of the school board in not publicizing the LGM religious holidays. I obtained my list from my contact at the local MCS and shared it among the principals and their administrative assistants.

Given that experience with the lack of recognition of the Low German-speaking Mennonite days of religious observance in the local school board, it came as no surprise, therefore, that the new Ontario Ministry of Education Equity and Inclusive Education Policy (EIE; 2009) would also omit this group from its resources. The policy itself has mandated that school boards within the province of Ontario must look critically at the practices that include or exclude students from public education. At face value this seemed to be a worthy and altruistic goal. However, when this policy was enacted by principals in their schools, Lily suggested that it could look something like:

When you talk about prayer, I mean the whole Equity and Inclusive Education, I mean we're going to allow smudging . . . so things are going to change and again, assumptions, we all assume that the LGM children wouldn't be able to say their prayers. Well, you know what; maybe they *would* be allowed to say their prayers. We all wouldn't say them, perhaps, or maybe we would have a different one each day, but there is a whole new lens we are looking through now. It really is inclusive and inclusive doesn't mean it has to be *my* way.

Just as Thomas' longevity in working with the LGM population afforded him a level of respect from the other administrators in the PLT, so too Lily's comments were apportioned greater import because of her position as a system principal. From the way in which everyone listened as she spoke, it appeared that to the other members of the PLT Lily represented more than just her own beliefs and experiences. She was also "the Board". While the principals consider Lily's comment, David responds:

Then what we are saying is that they are all the same and faith-based people don't believe that. [They] believe that there is more damage than being a culture that is identified against you because that will make you stronger rather than embracing everyone. [With my background in Christian private education] I think that I would be the most dangerous principal they have ever had in this public school because I could go waltzing into any of the Old Colony parochial schools and make it look good. But I don't believe what they believe, but I believe just close enough to make it sound like I do. I think that is dangerous.

While the members of the PLT respect David's deeply held faith, and appreciate the sharing of his message, several principals appeared uncomfortable. Talk about faith in schools has that effect on public school leaders. The profession of faith is the main issue that divides the public schools from those of the Catholic⁴ system. How therefore could

⁴ In Ontario, both the public and separate (or Catholic) school systems are supported by taxpayer funding. The curriculum is parallel but the Catholic school system includes aspects of faith and prayer that are central to the Roman Catholicism

faith practices—even when so intertwined with the cultural identity of being LGM—be enacted in a public school?

Carolina was quiet during the conversation about faith. An experienced administrator, she is a new principal but has worked extensively with Low German-speaking Mennonites. She mentioned a school in a neighbouring system has a small school that was designated as a “Mennonite school” several years ago and offered a newspaper article about the school for us to examine. I skimmed through the article from a local county newspaper that reported on the meeting. In the clipping, as a matter of public record, that in keeping with the description of being a “Mennonite school”, permission was granted for the entire school population to recite the Lord’s Prayer each morning led by a student on the public address system. As I learned on my research trip to Mexico in March, 2012, this practice parallels that of some of the LGM schools in Mexico. Additionally, Carolina continued, this Ontario school uses Christian literature unabashedly in its classrooms, and uses consumable workbooks featuring photos of conservative Mennonites in the curriculum ordered from *Christian Light Education* in Virginia, U.S.A. Further, she disclosed that although each child may not use the alternate curriculum, it is there for those areas in the Ontario Curriculum that are deemed not suitable for the LGM children (e.g. Health). David presses Carolina to confirm what she has just told the PLT:

So [in the other school] the teacher delivering that curriculum isn’t Mennonite?

Because we could put in the Lord’s Prayer at [my school]. We could add all these trappings, but fundamentally *we* are not Mennonites. We are not the role models that the parents want those children to have. Faith just oozes out of their teachers

and the education is filtered through the lens of the teacher's faith. So you can't put all these little things in place that are superficial. Nobody's going to be fooled.

Carolina stops hedging and shared with the group what she knew of the school practices in this school first-hand. She used to teach at the Mennonite designated school.

Additionally, she is married to an LGM man who emigrated from Durango, Mexico who is also a public school educator. Carolina recalls her experiences with parents at the Mennonite public school:

But you could hear people talk and the parents were saying, 'Oh we aren't registering at [another school] because they don't understand the Mennonite faith.' Schools like yours, David are very well respected in the Mennonite community...because you do so many things at that school that are right. It certainly might not be a reflection of your own faith, but certainly the values that you have instilled within the building accommodate theirs.

David responded with comments made more passionately than in most other PLT discussions. Roberto and Aganetha had both commented on his level of patience and how he is respected for his ability to work with challenging school communities. The principals listened carefully to his response:

I do understand where they are coming from. When Mennonites send their kids, just like those who send their kids to a Christian school, they want it to BE a Christian school, not a shallow little reproduction. They want the hidden curriculum to be Christian, like the words that casually come out of a teacher's mouth. They want the teachers to support what the faith at home says.

The principals discussed whether or not the saying of the Lord's Prayer by LGM students could be accommodated at the beginning of each day. Keith pondered whether the inclusion of the prayer could be authentically introduced with the help of the Equity and Inclusive Education mandate (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). David added, "I don't think people understand just how deep faith-based education is. It's not just saying the Lord's Prayer. In fact, I wouldn't want somebody saying it if it didn't mean anything to them". The room fell silent as the principals reflected on a challenge that has been laid bare, one much larger than others that have been discussed: the meaning of faith-based education, inclusion, and assimilation. While a discussion of faith offered an entry point during this PLT discussion (24 August 2011) to better understand the LGM community, some of the principals referred to another important way to learn more about the LGM: through an exploration of their use of language, especially Low German.

5.4 Language (Low German) as a bridge to culture

The PLT members were aware of some school practices (e.g., Lord's Prayer and deep faith-based education, traditional dress and Christian literature) that were sought out by LGM parents. However, several principals voiced their struggle to connect with the Low German-speaking Mennonite families. Catarina reported that she felt that the children were "there during school and then gone. I didn't see them in sports or clubs and then they left for Mexico and I didn't see them until EQAO". It was Roberto who suggested that the use of their language could help to build a bridge between the LGM and the school. While only Keith, David, and Carolina reported that they had a Low German-speaking staff member, these principals told the PLT of the different ways in which they used the gift of communicating in the LGM's first language as a bridge to

connect them with the school. Roberto had gone to the MCS to have documents translated into Low German. Teresa reported that she used the older children to help act as translators. David combined the written translation of school newsletters and the use of Low German speakers to communicate with others to help them to understand what was happening in the school. His administrative partner shared the success of David's strategies with the PLT:

I think that I have learned a great deal from David and watching him. I assumed that people could read newsletters and then come to assemblies and know exactly what is going on. But it wasn't until David told me about having newsletters read on the radio station that I realized how important that accommodation [from written to oral language] would be for this population.

David continued, downplaying his role in seeking out these important resources to communicate with his school LGM community:

We have someone on our school council who speaks and writes sort of a version of High and Low German and so we asked her to put a newsletter together about the Mad Scientist coming to the school. She put a flier together and I included some Low German on the school sign out the front. The Mad Scientist was well attended. At the Christmas assembly, an LGM staff member came up and spoke to the audience in her first language. She just wished them a happy holiday and that validates their presence, their identity in our school.

The use of language and faith (e.g. Christmas greetings in Low German) reflected an authentic, cultural bridge with the LGM in David's school. Following this example, the

PLT conversation slowly became a sharing of best practice in each school using Low German as the vehicle. Teresa adds her experience with:

a German Club that was open to all the students, not just the LGM. [The teacher] even got parents to come in and do a choir--it was amazing at Christmas. It really brought people out because it was a group of girls who did--I won't call them songs . . . like a chanting sort of thing--all in High German.

The chanting that Teresa described is actually the *Lange Wies* (long melody) in which songs are sung in the Old Colony church. Following my trip to Mexico I shared a sound clip of this type of singing from the Old Colony church service that I had attended on Campo 2a/2b to help the principals connect the importance of the singing of the school German choir to their faith practice—a demonstration of religious or liturgical literacy.

For the principals, Low German was the observed connection to the unseen and little understood home practice of the Low German Mennonites. From the PLT discussion and in particular from the first hand experiences of Carolina in the designated Mennonite School, the principals learned how deeply the faith practices of the LGM are embedded. Lily Hiebert Rempel, Program Co-ordinator from the Mennonite Central Committee describes the Low German-speaking Mennonites as “definitely not a cookie-cutter group” (Lily Rempel, personal communication, January 14, 2013). She draws attention to the need to understand those who identify as Mennonite as “a religion, a language, a traditional life-view, a cultural history” – so much more than just one concept of what it needs to be Mennonite that could be applied in every situation.

Given the new Equity and Inclusion mandate, are school leaders expected to have a depth of understanding of each cultural group that is represented in their school? From my own administrative experience, I suggest that one response lies in the way in which a school principal perceives the community of students and families that she leads. Ideas of shared strategies, best practice, and “next practice” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) are short term solutions. In attending to the conversation of the participating principals, as David suggested, there is a definite need for school leaders to become “culturally proficient” (Field note 21 September 2011).

5.5 The need for cultural proficiency

This final sub-theme in the data connected the principals’ ideas of *best practice*, next practice and what it meant to be culturally proficient as a school leader. Each principal participating in the research was familiar with the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat’s “best practice” (e.g., the use of a “Q Chart” a classroom strategy that appears to have the greatest success in assisting students with their comprehension of a text and then viewed as a classroom literacy practice). These strategies had been “workshopped” with principals from across the school system in conjunction with the board strategy for meeting the EQAO targets of 75% at Level 3 or above at age 12 in 2008. The principals in the PLT who had been administrators in 2008 noted that these same strategies were apparent in the School Effectiveness Framework (2012) and were mandated for use across all schools in the province of Ontario. As Keith, recently come into administration from a system position, shares with the group,

How much stuff . . . how many new ideas, different ways, and expensive resources do [teachers] need? They’re not implementing because they are always

getting. I have all this stuff coming to me and I am not using any of it really because I am still trying to get more stuff that I am told that I need. They haven't had time to try it . . . oh and if it didn't work, try it again, not just it didn't work and I need more stuff. If you tried it once and it doesn't work, you try it again and keep going!

His administrative partner, David, chimes in:

So if you have all this stuff coming at you and you aren't implementing anything, then you just go back to doing what you always did, or tracking and collecting data. And we have enough data! We are swimming in data!

From these two examples, it appeared that the issue is not lack of information, strategies or resources. It is, however, the *right* resources to fit with a school community and the lack of time for implementation. In their new book, *Professional Capital* (2012), Hargreaves and Fullan assert that “we [as systems] are paying more attention to leadership and leadership development but are still putting too much faith in leaders as heroic, individual saviours rather than communities of leaders who . . . build on each other's work over time” (p. 44). However, if a “best practice” isn't working, there doesn't appear to be any latitude for the principal to, as Catarina suggested, “call someone and tell them it doesn't fit”. Instead, principals in the PLT discussed how they tried to use best practice strategies that aren't meant to work with students who have no written language to compare to the learning of a new language, or the depth of faith that is evidenced by the use of Low or High German (26 April 2011). As the principals participating in this research attest, you can't put pressure on this group of minoritized

students and their families. Teresa asserted, “You can’t put a lot—like homework and extra reading—on this group. If you want to be successful you don’t push or they disappear”. So are principals to just assume that what is happening is best for these children, or are they creating what Fullan and Hargreaves label “next practices” (2012, p. 51)?

“Next practices” are the strategies and ideas that are innovative, and often begin with the teachers themselves as opposed to experts from outside the classroom. I am reminded of Keith’s reflexive representative of a “Literacy Salesman” in which he illustrated that his responsibility as an administrator was not simply to list those strategies from the framework but to ensure that the *best* things happened in classes with children even if they were not successful, or if there was no evidence of success. When I asked participating PLT principals what they assumed was going on in classrooms as good teaching and good support of the LGM, I was immediately barraged by the “LNS speak” of “best practice” language followed by more careful consideration of more culturally specific practices:

Teresa: Differentiated instruction, big time . . . [pause] Or . . . [pause] well, I believe anyway . . .

Roberto: Valuing of the culture. But I look at the staff and I see those that genuinely *do* value the culture and it comes across in what they plan and so on, but then I see others who know what is best for the kids, but they may not be as welcoming . . . I guess I shouldn’t say that, but I think some of those folks carry more weight with their colleagues than they should, which I find scary. I find that I don’t even hear anyone allowing LG in the classroom.

Teresa: I haven't heard anyone say that it isn't okay [to speak LG in the regular classroom], so we just seem to go with that. You go with what works.

David: I think that's how it works—go with what you know is best for your students.

Teresa: The teachers who struggle with what to do with kids who don't know the alphabet and are in Grade 6, right, because we have that right now in Grade 4, 5, and 6. We have a huge group of kids who don't have a clue, so the [teachers] are looking for any kind of help to save the kids. I have never heard that, [English only in school] but I think at one time that may have been the thinking that may have been the norm.

Roberto: I was just checking because I hadn't heard anyone say DON'T speak Low German.

As I recount this discussion I also recall how it took all of my will power to remain an observer and not comment that the Ontario Ministry of Education document *Many Roots, Many Voices* whole-heartedly supports the use of L₁ (or first language) to learn English (L₂) (2005, p. 15). As a former administrator I wonder why using an L₁ as a basis from which to learn a second language would even be questioned. As David said, 'you do what works for your students'. Teresa continues with the ways in which she hears Low German in her school:

Yeah, they all speak it . . . on the yard, in the washrooms. When I get a new kid especially in JK/SK when they are crying and you don't have a clue what they are saying. I am always getting the older kids, or the siblings to come and help me to talk with the parents. I find a lot of people come

in with somebody, their sister-in-law, or their neighbour or somebody, but I always get the kids to translate for kids and I buddy them up all the time. I don't even care if they are in the right classroom; I just stick them with people who care and who can talk to them so that they aren't lost and frightened.

In light of the beliefs of these principals to do what “works for their students”, the discussion in the PLT (17 May 2011) uncovered the concept that there is more to understanding how to work with the LGM than developing a syncretic literacy to make yourself understood to parents or newcomers. The data showed there was a strong need for the principal to be not simply aware of the culture, but in David's words, to be *culturally proficient*.

While it is beyond the scope of this research to delve too deeply into the literature on theories of race, multiculturalism, and culture, there is a need for principals to be proficient in leading their schools in as much as they need to be cognizant that their school community is not a homogeneous grouping of people. Boykin and Noguera (2011) advocate for principals and teachers to have the requisite skills to teach effectively regardless of race, class, or culture (p. 28). They have hopes of a time where schools are no longer ... the “emissaries of dominant culture” or teachers the assimilators of students from different backgrounds into a homogenous school community (Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. 29). Instead, the importance of building relationships that the principals discussed in Chapter Four is highlighted with a view of addressing difference proactively. In the literature, responding proactively through relationship building is termed as being *culturally proficient* (Lindsey, Robbins & Terrell, 2009) in working to counter the framing of difference – one that uses relationships and “next practices” as its tools.

Because cultural proficiency is not a program or a framework, it begins from the inside out. It isn't an add-on or "one more thing to implement". Instead, it offers a way of thinking that can be integrated into the existing culture of the school. I submit that if schools were to adopt a mindset of working with and learning from the "Other", then the marginalization of students, staff and members of the school community would be significantly diminished. Manuals and resources such as those supporting the Ministry of Education's Equity and Inclusion policy that contain a one page crib sheet of a particular culture would be obsolete and unnecessary. Particular resources that are needed within a school or group of schools could then be created by those in the school and with those for whom the resource is intended – much like the literacy resources that were created by the PLT.

5.6 The literacy resources of the PLT

In an attempt to understand the southwestern Ontario school community, and in particular the Low German-speaking Mennonite population, the PLT asked difficult questions of school and of each other, discussed, debated, responded and each participating principal went back to his or her own school to shape ideas and create resources. During the tenure of the PLT group, we met collectively several times in public venues but also in host schools. A former Old Colony Mennonite woman who now works within the LGM population as an outreach worker was invited to speak to the group about building bridges to education. The group toured the designated Mennonite school in a neighbouring board and then met with an extended PLT that included several members of senior administration from that system, the principal of the school, and interested staff to debrief and for a Q & A. As will be discussed further in Chapter Six,

the methodology of this research transformed itself and the PLT became a powerful, action-driven collective whose members worked together outside of the PLT meetings to deepen their understanding of the LGM culture. One of the most enriching discussions followed a discovery by Carolina that:

The *Reading A-Z*[®], you know, we all have them on the computer in our schools. The little books? Well that is how this family, one of the parents was telling me, that is how this family learned to read English. It is what her children were bringing home from school so we started putting together a package for her kids to take back with them when they went to Mexico.

The conversation continued about the value of the *Reading A-Z*[®] books as a supplement to what the LGM children had at home for reading material. One of the group asked if the children would read in Low German as well. The group debated whether the children would read High German, Low German or indeed would read any language at home. I offered a synopsis of my understanding of Cummins' (2012) dual language project with selected schools in the Toronto area, and how in recognizing the need for the children to use their first language to learn another, he utilized books that told the same story in two languages--hence, bilingual or *dual language*. The use of dual language stories was followed by the creation of *identity texts* (i.e., stories that the children create about their experiences choosing the way in which to demonstrate their ideas (multiliteracies) and the languages (multilingual) with which to communicate information about themselves). The PLT group was enthusiastic and we—including myself as participant/observer—selected stories from a variety of levels of *Reading A-Z*[®] books to have translated by a Low German-speaking Mennonite teenager from the Rhineland church as her summer

work. The money that was paid to her for translation of our English texts enabled her to afford tuition to a Bible college in Sussex, New Brunswick in 2012.

The copies of the translated *Reading A-Z*[®] books were shared at the PLT meeting in August, 2011. Each administrator received a binder of stories ranging from level AA – M. The Low German translation was at the top of the page and the English story at the bottom. In creating the books in this way, the photos or pictures that would be of assistance to the reader weren't covered by print. (See Appendix J for an example of a translated dual language text). The stories selected by the PLT were reviewed by the translator. She made the final choice of books—those that she deemed culturally and locally appropriate—about making salsa, weather and seasons, the farm, the family, and other stories that would invite LGM children to bring their funds of knowledge to the text. The meeting was filled with the excited voices of the administrators as they brainstormed the different ways in which the dual language texts could be used by classroom and ESL teachers. The following list represents only a few of the many ideas they generated (24 August 2011):

- Patterns for creating their own stories
- Reading with a buddy in one language and then in the other
- Working in pairs with an English friend to buddy-read the text
- Reading the stories at school as a shared reading experience and then have each child take one home, not just the LGM students
- Enlarging the text and add a third language – High German
- Using the books to create a dual language vocabulary list

As the administrators shared their ideas, I observed that this was the first time that they had discussed what could happen at the classroom level to support Low German Mennonite children. While the other resources they had discussed had accounted for differences in languages, in modality, and even in faith, they had all been activities of the principal as manager, or principal as leader and not of the principal as *literacy* leader. How familiar were principals with the ELL strategies and the literacy strategies being used to support children in classes? What were the literacy practices in classrooms and how could they become “*next* practices” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) instead of “best practices”?

In learning to understand a community, I would suggest that an administrator is unable to learn the nuances of every culture of each child in the school. However, in the case of this PLT, the majority of the ELL students in the group’s jurisdiction are from the minoritized culture that brought the group together and yet so little has been done to support their connection to the public school. As a mother from the Rhinelander Church recently said to me when she met me in a tiny tortilla store in a small town in the research area, “I am so glad that you are learning Low German. After all this time here, why do we [the Low German-speaking Mennonites] always have to be the ones to speak English?” (Mrs. Peters, personal communication, June 2012). In her words, I am reminded of Thomas’s comment at our initial PLT meeting, “when [the LGM] start doing things, it will change the culture of this town itself” and his increased realization that *many* cultures contribute to the local community. Thomas’s comment also reflects the growing acknowledgement that the LGM are more resident than transient and speaks to the impact that their presence should have in the town.

5.7 Summary

By foregrounding the principals' experiences in their schools and their bridge-building strategies using Low German, and then highlighting some of the contested ground related to faith-based education and its importance to this culture, it becomes evident that a simple, autonomous model of literacy as prescribed by the Ontario curriculum, and assessed by EQAO, is not an adequate fit for the complexities of this culture. The well-intentioned, yet often superficial ways in which public schools are connecting to the large population of LGM that reside in or migrate to and from the research area are not effective. Again, this research is not about fault, but is an attempt to describe "what is". Often, in reducing the LGM to an anomaly of language (an oral tradition, not written or read) or of faith, or of transnationalism, the data suggests that educators miss putting pieces in place that celebrate the uniqueness of the children in this culture. Further, being Mennonite becomes a monolithic label that reduces the nuances of this minoritized culture to an inserted page in the Ontario Ministry of Education's Equity and Inclusion resource manual.

The joy in the discussion that surrounded the sharing of the translated text at the PLT meeting was palpable on the audio tape as I played it back during transcription. It sounded like the excited voices of administrators shedding the load of responsibility for school improvement and increased test scores, for safe schools and health and safety, and becoming again the enthusiastic teachers who enjoyed the interaction of learning with a group of students.

In the final chapter, I summarize my findings from the three themes that I identified from the data: Theme one: principals' perspectives of school leadership; Theme two: principals' definitions of literacy; and Theme three: principals'

understandings of the Low German-speaking Mennonite community. In the chapter, I embed these findings within the current literature on multiliteracies, literacy theory, and sociocultural theory in response to the research question: what can the stories of principals teach educators about the relationship between school literacy and the literacies of children who are minoritized?

6. Chapter Six

“It is hard to argue that we are teaching the whole child when school policy dictates that students leave their language and culture at the schoolhouse door”.

(Many Roots, Many Voices, 2005, p. 37)

6.1 Discussion Points and Recommendations

6.1.1 Introduction

This final chapter elaborates on my findings from this study that had as its goal to explore the relationship between school literacy and the literacy practices of a minoritized culture taking as my case the Low German-speaking Mennonites (LGM). I structured a Principal Learning Team (PLT) comprised of administrators from several schools in the same geographical region of southwestern Ontario each of whom had high concentrations of LGM students in their schools in order to respond to my research questions:

1. What can the stories of principals teach educators about the relationship between school literacy and the literacies of children who are minoritized?
2. What do principals say they have learned about literacy teaching and learning from LGM children and their families?
3. What do principals say they have done in the school environment to support the school literacy development of primary children who are minoritized?
4. What influences how a principal leads a school community (e.g. definitions of literacy)?
5. What are the implications for principals as literacy and curriculum leaders?

6.2 Discussion Points

The school leaders were brought together in the study as a PLT to share their narratives and examine critical incidents related to literacy in school, of working with LGM students and their families, and of school leadership. I drew the following conclusions from the study in response to my research questions:

1. Over the course of our PLT discussions, school leaders became increasingly aware of the mismatch of models between the daily demonstrations of meaning making, or multiliteracies, by the LGM and the restrictive ways in which school literacy was taken up as strictly reading and writing. The Ministry documents (e.g., Ontario Language Arts Curriculum, 2006) advocate for opportunities for reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and representing, yet the shadow of EQAO with its laser-like focus on reading and writing has far greater influence on the ways in which literacy is taken up in both school and classroom practice.
2. In the PLTs, principals expressed that they began to develop strategies to connect with the LGM children and families. A key strategy was their use of Low German as a bridge to create trust between themselves and LGM families. A deeper understanding of LGM culture by the principals followed their initial recognition of the importance of using Low German.
3. Over time in the PLTs, principals expressed that they were making a concerted effort to become “culturally proficient” (Lindsey, Robbins & Terrell, 2009) when working with their school communities.
4. Despite their increasing recognition of LGM children’s literacies and their expressed desire to recognize these literacies in school curricula and pedagogy, the principals were confined and constrained by external frameworks and models (e.g., Ontario Leadership Framework and local school review tools). This made it very difficult if not impossible to be fully responsive to the students as leaders.

Each of the above is discussed in turn in relation to my research questions and the study data. Further, I will demonstrate the contribution that each of the findings makes to the

literature and the implications – or lessons – that each has for the school principal as the school literacy leader.

6.2.1 Mismatch between definitions of literacy

Prominent in the data was the mismatch of models of literacy between school literacy (as reading and writing as measured, for example, by EQAO assessments) and the daily demonstrations of multiliteracies in schools. Over the course of our PLT discussions, school leaders became increasingly aware of this mismatch. Some Ministry curriculum documents (e.g., Ontario Language Arts Curriculum, 2006) afford opportunities for listening, speaking, viewing, and representing. However, the onus on performance in reading and writing as measured by EQAO hijacks the programmatic curriculum and transforms the classroom literacy curriculum.

As I stated in the literature review, much of what is written in the area of school leadership deals with school improvement (e.g., Reeves, 2006; Schmoker, 2001). When viewed through the lens of literac(ies), school improvement is about increasing scores in reading and writing—the curricular areas most often used in large scale assessments to denote growth and progress toward a target (e.g., EQAO). However, reading and writing with a focus on print as school literacy is a very narrow view of literacy. In assessing only reading and writing on large scale assessments in Ontario, school literacy as print literacy is positioned as the only literacy that “counts”. In fact, school literacy as print literacy disregards listening, speaking, viewing, and representing; four of the other dimensions of language arts contained in the Ontario Language Arts curriculum. Further, school literacy as strictly reading and writing thereby assumes that all literacy can be

measured by pencil and paper tests. LGM children provide an interesting foil to this assumption because their first language is primarily oral, not written or read.

From the data, it is evident that some of the principals in the study recognized that what they were seeing was more than print literacy (e.g. David's understanding that school newsletters in Low German also needed to be shared on the radio to address the oral nature of Low German). But they also recognized that the system supports provided to principals align specifically with reading and writing improvement only (e.g., Teresa's discussion of the need for more ESL support for her new LGM students in readiness for the EQAO assessment). The autonomous view (Street, 1984) of literacy works with the assumption that the skills themselves—autonomously—will affect other social and cognitive practices. The autonomous model of literacy views literacy as neutral and universal rather than containing cultural assumptions within it. This model imposes a cultural lens of literacy onto another culture. The pedagogical practices associated with the autonomous model of literacy in the study were those that focused on reading and writing as a genre of print literacy consistent with the skills tested by EQAO.

The narrow view of print literacy promoted by EQAO contradicts the wider perspective of literacy that is illustrated in some Ministry documents (e.g., Language Arts, 2006) that at least gesture toward multiple modes of meaning making. It appears, therefore, that there is some conceptual confusion with regards to models of literacy from the Ministry that effect practice at the school level. While both EQAO (as an arms-length organization of the Ministry of Education) and the Curriculum Division of the Ministry of Education share roots as government organizations, they diverge in what they name as literac(ies) and how those literacies are taught and assessed. While the skills and

expectations contained in the Language Arts curriculum are assessed and progress against a standard reported in each grade, the EQAO assessment is only written twice—once at the end of the Primary division (Grade 3) and again at the end of the Junior division (Grade 6). However, the print literacy of EQAO is privileged by virtue of the power of the results. Schools are ranked across a system according to EQAO results. Additional reading and writing resources are deployed according to EQAO results. Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat officials with expertise in reading and writing are deployed to the schools ranking the lowest on EQAO results. These actions occur *in spite* of local and school system knowledge, such as that expressed by the principals in this study that literacy is culturally specific and some schools, especially those with students from minoritized cultures, end up negating their students' funds of knowledge and literacies because of EQAO.

The study data suggests that even local school system resources are deployed more often to align with the policy of improving reading and writing scores, than to support the local demonstrations of literac(ies). As discussed by Teresa, preparing for EQAO assessment has risen to the status of a literacy practice so there is even greater emphasis on reading and writing in Grades 3 and 6 than may be called for strictly by the programmatic curriculum. However, the LGM children's ability to speak and understand several languages and their ability to make meaning across contexts to help parents understand what was happening at school as reported by David, indicate that some of the principals are aware of the multiplicity of literacies through which their LGM students communicate. The literacy practices of the LGM students – speaking, listening, viewing,

and representing – are not a part of EQAO. Their demonstrations of multiliteracies were a mismatch for the print literacy skills required by EQAO.

The mismatch between the school system that supports a print literacy and autonomous perspective through its “high yield” strategies (EQAO, 2006) and the demonstrations of literacy at the school level as socially constructed, containing multiple ways of meaning making has important implications for school leaders. The recommendations from this study to address the mismatch are two-fold: First, the mismatch might be softened if school leaders become more familiar with an ideological model of literacy and multiliteracies so that they can *name* the demonstrations of multiliteracies that they observe in their schools. However, to truly address the mismatch, principals must be given greater autonomy to respond to their students’ demonstrations of literacy in a way that honours students’ funds of knowledge and allows schools to be responsive to their students. This is my second but related recommendation from this research.

While school leaders in this study, became more cognizant of the mismatch of models, this awareness took time, effort, and a particular kind of scaffolding to develop. According to the data from the initial discussions of the PLT, the principals used the “EQAO” speak when referring to literacy production in the school and in specific classrooms. Several administrators, in particular Teresa and Thomas, mentioned the difficulty of supporting LGM children through ESL classes to ready their skills for EQAO, but the awareness of this apparent disconnect did not register as a difficulty in framing what was meant by “litera(ies)” until several meetings later. This “aha” moment in the PLT discussion coincided with the principals’ realization that they themselves

needed to create materials that were in keeping with the LGM ways of knowing and demonstrations of literacy and then share those materials with the classroom teachers.

The ability to recognize their student's literacy practices and knowledge, especially given the closed nature of the LGM community, was not easy for the principals and is not likely to be easy for other educators. The principals were "edgewalkers" (Krebs, 1999) conducting border work with LGM students and families. This means that principals need to negotiate two different models of literacy and cultures in their work with the LGM. The LGM community, by virtue of its own teachings of pacifism and living as "the quiet in the land", is relatively unknown and little understood. School, therefore, becomes an interesting "interface" (Levinson, 2007) where the culture of a minoritized group bumps up against the dominant group. The funds of knowledge of the LGM children are difficult to recognize because this is a cultural group that does not wish to be "known". LGM students and parents often shy away from researchers and refrain from speaking about their beliefs.

Still, over time and through their daily school interactions with the LGM families, the school leaders came to realize and name two very different literacies and sought to ensure that classroom teachers were aware of the narrow pedagogies associated with the literacy practices of EQAO test preparation. The findings of this study lead to the recommendation that principals must highlight not only the EQAO and LNS "best practices" to improve print literacy, but also the "extraordinary pedagogies" (Faltis & Abedi, 2013, p. vii) of multiliteracies as demonstrated by LGM students as an example of the meaning making of the children from a minoritized culture. Further to naming of the models of litera(cies) at work in their schools, school leaders must bring attention to the

demonstrations of literacy they are seeing as well as the print literacy of reading and writing for EQAO during classroom walk-throughs, staff meetings, and discussions with superintendents.

A further, related recommendation is for greater latitude to be given to principals at the school level by the school system to enable school leaders to work within board allocations of resources and personnel yet deploy those supports in ways that make sense for each school. Further, senior administration must empower principals to use the exemption and accommodation mechanisms within EQAO to recognize literacies of students who are not yet adept at using the print literacy of a new culture, but who *can* “show what they know” using more syncretic forms of literacy. As part of this recommendation, I suggest the upward advocacy from the level of the senior administration to EQAO on behalf of schools to include other methods of data collection (e.g., oral tape recordings, labelled drawings, or media representations) as acceptable ways to respond on large scale assessment. In the case of LGM, a focus on oral then written languages in addition to other syncretic literacy (making meaning using languages and texts, gestures, and other modes; Gregory, 2008) would enable further demonstrations of what these children know about making meaning. The implementation of these two recommendations would both support a broader view of literac(ies) at the school level, and encourage what “counts” as literacy to encompass more than simply the reading and writing that is currently privileged in Ontario schools.

6.2.2 Language as the bridge of trust

The principals discussed how they capitalized on the Low German language or order to find ways to support the literacies and knowledge of their students and to build a

bridge between themselves and LGM families. The principals' deepening understanding of LGM culture followed their initial recognition of the importance of using Low German. At the beginning of the study, the principals were not able to "read" and understand the subtleties of LGM culture. Their knowledge was limited to one or two cultural markers such as the Low German language and LGM traditional dress, yet even their knowledge of these was incomplete. In Keith's *Christmas Story*, for instance, he recounted his surprise at seeing many traditionally dressed families at the school Christmas concert—the number of families in traditional dress was significantly larger than he had estimated based on the dress of the children. Catarina admitted to the PLT that she had "no idea" what LGM were like before she started working in the geographic region where the study took place. In the face of limited knowledge, the principals had few places to turn to. As Catarina explained when she went looking for resources to support her work as the school leader with a high LGM population, she could find "nothing".

The literature related to the language and literacies of the LGM people—both in and out of school—is scant, and most often concerns the unwritten language of Low German that has been a hallmark of this culture throughout its history. Even this has only recently attracted the attention of linguists who are attempting to record the language in a written form (McCaffery, 2008). Other research (Hedges, 1999) alludes to the apparent diglossia that exists between the uses of Low German and High German to underscore the difference between the everyday, and the "Sunday-like" aspects of the Old Colony culture. Most often, principals reported hearing Low German used in school among family members and among children on the playground (Roberto, Field Notes, 21

Sept.11) and used this language to welcome students and families to their schools. It became evident to the principals through the PLT that to learn about LGM, the resources they needed were the LGM students and their families, and the way to access that information was to communicate with them in Low German.

The members of the PLT learned from each other in discussion, through tours of schools and facilities in a neighbouring board that also served the LGM community, and by creating resources in English and Low German. The Low German language bridge building between school and the LGM community took several forms including text, then speech. The first technique used by the school leaders was translated print. The principals recognized that several documents contained important information for parents to receive in order for their children to participate in school events. Most critical was the translation of newsletters and school documents by Low German speakers from school councils. However, as David shared, “the newsletters were still hitting the garbage can”. Thus, while the use of print forms of communication were natural to the principals, and were an important first step to use Low German with the LGM families, text wasn’t meeting the needs of a group whose first language was oral.

The group realized, as Roberto did, that, “many of these children have never seen their language written down” and that oral communication in Low German was vital. As a result, the principals realized that to interact with the LGM communication needed first to be oral—not the text or print literacy of school. Principals were concerned because many schools did not have Low German speakers on staff. However, principals went beyond their school buildings and invited members of the community to work in classrooms, to help translate and read announcements, as well as to *make* announcements

on the Low German radio station. In this way, Low German was used as a bridge into the LGM culture to build trust and understanding with the personnel in the schools.

Principals were also interested in learning some Low German to speak with the students. As Roberto indicated, “I made a point of speaking to a couple of kids and saying, ‘You have to help me out here and give me some homework so that I can learn some Low German’. So it is good . . . for the students to become the teachers”. The use of Low German was taken as a sign of willingness to learn and helped to instill trust among LGM families which school leaders saw has having huge positive implications. The importance of learning Low German was illustrated when a parent of one of my (now) teenaged students spoke to me in the grocery store, “It is good that [the] English are learning Low German. We have been here a long time. Why should everything only be in English? (Mrs. Peters, June 2012, Personal Communication). The principals in this research discovered that a simple *Gooden Morjen* went a long way to help build trust between school and home. In the case of little understood cultures, finding creative avenues for self-education is important. Children and families’ funds of knowledge can be respectfully accessed and leveraged by leaders such as those in this study and the ability of leaders to use the L₁ of minoritized cultures can be an important tool for trust building and welcoming.

6.2.3 Cultural Proficiency

Evident through examples such as the one above, principals increasingly worked to become *proficient in the culture* of the children whom they were serving. This was a necessary prerequisite for helping their students to practice their literacies and expand

their literacy repertoires. Still, more needs to be done to help schools indeed be “culturally proficient” (Lindsey, Robbins & Terrell, 2009).

In school policy, there is an increased recognition that schools need to be supportive of all students. While at the school level administrators and their staffs have been attempting to enact this concept for years, this notion has only been *specifically* captured in the recent Ministry of Education Equity and Inclusion in Education policy (2009). This Ontario policy goes to great lengths to illustrate the types of cultural responsiveness that school personnel should translate into their everyday practices. Cumbersome resource documents that attempted to encapsulate the many cultures and faiths represented in Ontario schools were created to support the policy. However, Low German-speaking Mennonites were absent from those pages illustrating yet again the minoritized and marginalized nature of this population.

LGM are mentioned by name in the Ontario Ministry of Education document, “English Language Learners: ESL and ELD Programs and Services” (2007) in regard to their status, not as ESL but rather as ELD.⁵ This is the first indication by the Ministry that the lack of formal school experience, coupled with the transnational nature of the population, could result in students being born in Canada but still having a language other than English as their first language and therefore requiring different types of school

⁵ English Literacy Development; the realization that some students who are born in Canada may have a first language that is other than English, and who may have had limited opportunity to develop literacy skills in any language. Additionally, schooling may have been intermittent

supports (p. 22). However, the importance of this distinction as ELD and not simply ELL has been “lost” under the mountain of documents, policies, and other work to which school leaders attend each day. As a result, the supports at the school level – in terms of resource personnel, time for ESL and delivery of the support – have remained the same. Thus it would appear that while changes may exist in policy, it takes a great deal of time for them to be enacted in school practice.

According to some of the principals in the PLT, small changes can mean a lot to minoritized students and their families. Both Teresa and Thomas discussed how each felt that there was a greater understanding of the uniqueness of the LGM experience by system senior administration prior to the school board amalgamation of 1997. This “understanding” included the saying of the Lord’s Prayer in addition to the singing of “O Canada” as part of the opening exercises each morning. Catarina expressed that she felt “limited” in the ways that she could recognize the LGM faith in the school. The principals were surprised at the obvious use of Christian literature in the classroom, the leading of the Lord’s Prayer by a Mennonite student in Low German on the announcements, and the presence of a framed copy of the same prayer in High German (the language attributed to Sunday) outside of the main office during a tour of a school in a neighbouring board. The principals questioned aloud during the tour how this overt display of Christian belief could take place in a public school in a neighbouring board in direct opposition to the directive from their system not to use the Lord’s Prayer, display Christmas trees, or sing carols. Both sites were public schools operating under the same legislation and policies, so how was *this* particular school able to enact many of the practices that the PLT participants had discussed but dismissed as being inappropriate

demonstrations of faith in a public school? According to the school officials from the other board, the answer lay in knowing what was valued by the LGM families in their area and implementing practices that LGM families were comfortable with to the degree to which they were able to within the school. However, how this school received permission to respond directly to the Mennonite, Christian LGM community with specific strategies and materials while remaining a public school is still unanswered.

As the PLT became a community for principals to share successful practices within each of their school communities, some aspects of culturally-specific celebrations (e.g., Low German announcements, cooking club) were introduced into their schools by principal-participants as examples of practices that were deemed appropriate for school by board officials. David, for instance, narrated his experience of having school newsletters read on the radio and asking a Low German-speaking staff member to speak at school gatherings and assemblies. Teresa recounted how popular the “German Choir” was at her school—even though she was unaware that the style of singing of the choir was the same as that used in Sunday service until that fact was shared with her at a PLT meeting. Some of the principals in the study approved the purchase of Christian literature for their school libraries but no classrooms had the materials on display in book bins as we had seen on our school tour. While there is room here for an exploration of the intersection of religion, culture and literacy and the implications for pedagogy, I believe that discussion is best left for another study.

Each of these demonstrations underscores the resourcefulness and creativity of the principals in trying to be responsive to the literacies of the LGM children in their schools. Their strategies were not those adopted from the pages of a reference book or Ministry

how-to, but instead were the results of earnest attempts to learn *with* and *from* the LGM. Ultimately what this suggests is that schools and educators need to take a larger, overarching view of working with and learning from those who are different than ourselves. Further, working with minoritized children and their families in schools transcends narrow conceptions of what it means to “teach” literacy. Educators must become “culturally proficient,” learning with and from the students and their families firsthand, and not relying solely or even mainly on external resources for their knowledge about a culture.

6.2.4 Leadership constrained by checklists and frameworks

At the same time that the principals said that the strategies they learned and developed helped them to address educating minoritized students, they also recognized the inexorable point at which even the best strategies would fail. The ability of the principals to lead literacy education, specifically vis-à-vis the Low German-speaking Mennonites, was constrained by specific organizational structures such as formal checklists (e.g., Ontario School Effectiveness framework), local school review frameworks, and EQAO. The principals, however, found collegiality, solace, and strength to deal with the tensions of trying to enact strategies within these constraints through the PLT.

Several of the principals said they had participated in the study because they wanted to be better leaders for LGM students. Catarina, for example, stated, “the benefits about learning more in relation to the LGM culture has been HUGE for me. I didn’t know so much . . . like the nuances in the unwritten rules about language, and the role of the father as the family head.” For Roberto, it was about the sharing of successful

practices and, “taking those ideas to my own school”. Further, he recounted that the PLT discussions were “good. It was honest [discussion]. It wasn’t the case that someone knew everything and everybody else was just writing it all down.” Evidently, many participants obtained practical benefit from participating in the PLT, but also drew strength from the recognition that other colleagues needed a collegial, trusting forum in which to ask questions and find answers, especially in light of the tensions in which they had to work.

The principals continue to meet, to share, to discuss and to learn from each other in the true definition of a Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998) where, “groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”(np). Our final research PLT meeting was held in November, 2011 but the most recent PLT meeting was held in December of 2012. On the agenda for the November meeting was the sharing of some newly created audio files to accompany the dual-language materials that the group had created. The December, 2012 meeting was held at a centre for Mennonite outreach and involved the participants offering Christmas greetings to the listeners of the LGM radio station in Low German and then speaking about their schools in English. The English messages were translated by the radio host into Low German. I include these dates to indicate that while the research has ended, the PLT still meets to share “extraordinary pedagogies” (Faltis & Abedi, 2013, p. vii). The membership of the PLT has changed over time due to retirements, school transfers, and the attendance of other school administrators from an adjoining school board who brought their successes and struggles to the group to share. Indeed, the work of learning with and from another culture is not over.

This study has an important contribution to make to the area of leadership, school leadership and to the school improvement literature. In questioning the nature of literacy leadership, the stories of the principals in this study have shown that literacy leadership involves looking beyond the models provided by the system and the Ministry of Education for the ideas that work for students and their families – in the case of this study, the creation of translated dual-language text in English and Low German. It is adopting the idea of doing the right thing for students, – such as letting them work in the fields for a week with their families to earn an income as opposed to being in school for EQAO rehearsal. Literacy leadership is about cultural proficiency and learning with and from a cultural group that is overlooked in the literature but whose presence is apparent by sheer numbers in some schools. As the stories of the principals in this study attest, it is about understanding the relationship between school and home and valuing what the children bring with them to school each day. In terms of literacy leadership, this study demonstrates that successful school literacy practices work hand in hand with understanding of student culture and multiliteracies. Further, the work of the principals to support the literacy learning of the minoritized students in their schools is not represented on a checklist or in a framework, but takes place any way as the work of principals who are willing to learn from and with the students and families in their schools. I assert that to be a “school leader,” administrators must not be constrained by “what is”, but must envision “what can be”. The work of Shields (2013) on “transformative leadership” wherein she draws from both Freire (1998) and Burns (1978) has particular promise for leaders who “take seriously the challenges inherent in leading

educational organizations diverse in terms of social identity markers such as ethnicity, class, socio-economic structure, or religious perspectives” (p. 2).

6.3 Further research

While this study examined the narratives of school leaders about the relationship between school literacy and home literacy practices of the Low German Mennonite students in their schools, the findings are still relevant for other administrators leading schools that are culturally diverse. While not generalizable, the four findings and the corresponding recommendations of this study can be *transferred* into other areas where the administration works with diverse school communities and specifically, like Low German-speaking Mennonites, those populations that are minoritized.

Further research could be conducted within a single school to document the demonstration of literacy leadership that was evident and how models of multiliteracies were (or were not) recognized and used in relation to school literacy. In the case of the LGM population, it would be helpful for the principals to disseminate the classroom resources that they created more widely and to share with other administrators the steps that they have taken to learn with and from the Low German-speaking Mennonite community.

Another research opportunity presents itself by examining the ways in which children and their families use (or do not use) the literacy resources that were produced by the principals. In this study, for reasons of anonymity, the children and the families were not approached for their perspectives on the literacies of school. However, given the relationships that have been developed by the school principals with the families in

their school communities, this type of research would be more possible than it may have been several years ago because the level of distrust of the public school system on the part of the LGM has lessened.

6.4 Contributions

This research is about literacy leadership, about school leaders, minoritized children, and wanting to make school a place that both recognizes and supports the many ways in which OCM children make meaning.

This study contributes to the literature:

- In being perhaps the only study involving public school administrators and Old Colony Mennonite students;
- On the relationship between school literacies and minoritized cultures;
- By adding to the research on the relationship between oral and print literacies based on culture;
- In questioning how Ontario public schools do/ do not provide for faith-based literacies; and
- By identifying some of the negative effects of washback from large scale assessments on children from a minoritized culture.

6.5 Conclusions

The end of a school lesson is usually marked by the review of a key piece of learning – a message that can be taken away, considered, and perhaps applied in another circumstance. My research question framed this study in terms of what the stories of the principals could *teach* educators about the relationship between school literacy and home literacy practices. Clandinin and Connelly's (1998) assertion that education lies at the heart of narrative inquiry and “not merely the telling of stories” (p. 246) serves to remind

both the reader and the researcher that important lessons must be taken from this work into classrooms, schools, and the wider world. The findings of this research offer salient lessons about literacy work with students, but in particular those from a minoritized culture who don't "fit" into prescribed learning models.

I find that the conclusion of this research study actually brings me back to where I began as a single administrator in a school with a large population of LGM students asking myself if I was truly recognizing the literacy practices and serving the literacy needs of my students. I learned how important it was to not wear a Harris Tweed jacket for fear of being questioned by the LGM students about my gender—only men wore blazers in their experience so how could I be a woman? I was confronted by ministers who were angry that books in the library contained illustrations of animal births and were accessible to LGM children who were not to learn about sex or reproduction outside of the family if at all. I was treated to homemade bread warm from the oven in exchange for bringing a sick child home, and beautiful hand drawn cards and letters with my name carefully spelled out in English. How little I knew about the LGM children and families in my school and community and how much I wanted to learn in order to better support their literacy knowledge and practices while at school. However, I was "outside" and anything that I could learn was to be accomplished very slowly and in tandem with teachers (children and their parents) from inside the community.

This notion of "insider" and "outsider" is prevalent within the Old Colony community. Much of the available research has been conducted by authors and researchers who were brought up as LGM but who now live in the world and are no longer part of the most traditional church groups. They too are in a position as

“edgewalker”: they know their LGM background, and are able to share that from outside, but they also realize the hurt that some revelations could cause inside the LGM community and to those family members who still live as members of traditional LGM churches.

As a school leader working with large numbers of LGM children I also recall my feelings of being constrained by the system definitions of English Language Learners: how the support of an ESL teacher was allocated from the system in a way that did not take into account the anomalies of the LGM with Canadian birthplaces; didn't account for the little time spent in school in Ontario; or for a first language that was other than English. Now after 18 months of data collected from 10 administrators and six schools, I have learned that others acknowledge the same constraints but in *hushed* tones. The retired principals and those who have gone on to other work like Teresa and Aganetha are less concerned about the “correctness” of their opinions and whether their words may cause repercussions for their schools, or for themselves. However, those who aspire to other positions, to other schools, to be recognized as “good leaders” are careful to hedge their responses and to let others speak first.

As long as practicing principals feel they must use “hushed” tones to respond to questions of leadership and especially to literacy leadership because of expected loyalty to policies from the systems that hire them, and could as easily isolate them, the underlying issue will never be addressed. As leaders and educators we are effectively silenced. We, as researchers, administrators, school leaders, and educators, must take action. We need to ask ourselves what DO we actually DO to *support* the literacy learning of students whose literacies and funds of knowledge are not a match with those

of the dominant culture? A non-response is a response—one that condemns those with other ways of knowing, other ways of making meaning and forces them into a model of school literacy teaching that *doesn't* work, it is one that places administrators in a position in which they have to enact policies that *don't* fit with what they see each day in schools. How *can* school leadership take a stand against the constraints placed on doing what needs to be done at the school level in spite of the regulations and legislation that exist to regulate education by controlling leadership?

Children are depending on our response.

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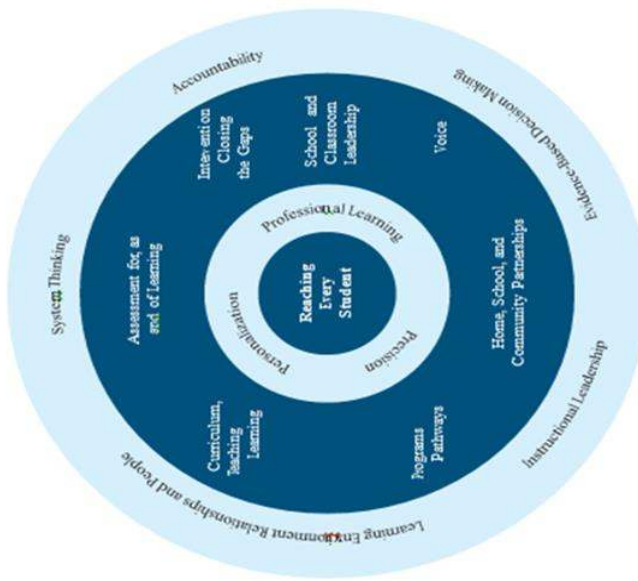
Appendices

APPENDIX A

Ontario School Effectiveness Framework

K-12 SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS FRAMEWORK

A support for school improvement and student success



Assessment for as end of Learning

- Students and teachers share a common understanding of the learning goals and related success criteria.
- During learning, students receive ongoing, descriptive feedback based on the success criteria, from the teacher and from peers.
- Successes are recognized and celebrated as milestones along the way.
- Students are given the opportunity to reflect on their learning and to share their learning goals with the content of the Ontario curriculum and/or subject-specific standards (e.g., the Ontario Curriculum and/or subject-specific standards).
- Assessment for as end of Learning is used to monitor the quality of learning progress evidence for existing the learning goals.
- Ongoing communication is in place to allow students, teachers and parents to effectively monitor student learning.

School and Classroom Leadership

- Collaborative, instructional leadership helps identify the challenges and success metrics for learning.
- Processes and practices are designed to engage content knowledge and skills necessary to support student learning and achievement.
- Organizational structures are coherent, flexible and required to support the needs of students.

Student Voice

- The learning and learning environment is visible and reflects evidence-based practices, needs and learning preferences.
- School programs, activities, policies and procedures are designed to reflect the diversity, needs and interests of the school population.

Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

- A culture of high expectations supports the belief that all students can learn, progress and achieve.
- A clear, explicit design with differentiated learning and teaching practices supports the belief that all students can learn, progress and achieve.
- Teaching and learning incorporates the necessary content, skills and knowledge to support student learning and achievement.
- Learning is supported through authentic, relevant and meaningful student inquiry.

Programs and Pathways

- Programs, activities and other (planned) and the learning and teaching experiences are designed to meet the needs of all students.
- Academic learning experiences and experiential learning are designed to meet the needs and interests of all students.

Home, School and Community Partnerships

- The school council has a meaningful role in supporting learning and achievement for students.
- Students, parents and community members are engaged and supported to help them support student learning and their productive participation in school operations.

APPENDIX B

Ethics Approval



THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO FACULTY OF EDUCATION

USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE

Review Number: 1011-2
 Principal Investigator: Rachel Heydon
 Student Name: Wendy Crocker
 Title: *Through Principals' Eyes: Stories of the Relationship Between School Literacies and the Literacy Practices of Mennonite Children*
 Expiry Date: October 31, 2011
 Type: Ph.D. Thesis,
 Ethics Approval Date: November 2, 2011
 Revision #:
 Documents Reviewed and Approved: UWO Protocol, Letter of Information & Consent

This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or information/consent documents may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB, except for minor administrative aspects. Participants must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information/consent documentation and/or recruitment advertisement, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

APPENDIX C

The Colouring Curriculum

My ritual morning visit to the hallways and classrooms of the school was the favourite part of my day. I could feel the sense of community as I strolled past art displays, demonstrations of social skills, bulletin boards holding photos of students' excited faces as they clutched the "award" for that week and greeted students in the hall with a smile and a wink. My stops included different classrooms dependent on the cycle day – odd numbered days I would ascend the stairs to the third and fourth grade classes, while even days heralded my visits to the Early Years, library and grades one and two pods. I made a point of visiting the English as a Second Language class in the library mezzanine. This was the group of students from each grade who required additional support in learning English, as their first language was Spanish or Plautdietsch. There they were – craning their necks to get a better look at the illustrations in the big book being read by their teacher. They chimed in with the familiar pattern. Obviously, I thought to myself, this is a favourite story. I attempted to quietly join the group, but was welcomed with loud, "Hi's" and "Come read". I stayed for a demonstration of their reading from the text and noted their ability to select key words and point to the picture in the story. I congratulated them on their reading in English, at which they all beamed. One young grade two girl with bright blue eyes and beautiful long braided hair asked me if I remembered. "Remembered what?" I teased. As I turned to leave I called out, "Goodemorje" (Good morning in Plautdietsch). I heard a giggle behind me, and I knew that it was she acknowledging the retention of my lesson from a group of girls on the playground several days before.

Later that day, I had cause to visit the classroom of this student. It was quiet as I entered and I noted the children at the carpet with the teacher, reading from a big book. My eyes scanned the heads for the student from the morning's reading lesson with the ESL teacher thinking that I might prompt the teacher to invite the student to tell the class about that book. I couldn't see her. I widened my gaze to include the entire classroom. There, at the back, working in a duotang on colouring sheets was the Mennonite "reader" from the morning. I smiled and winked at her. She sullenly lowered her head back to her work without acknowledging my "hello".

The intention of my visit was lost as I turned on my heel and left the classroom. I didn't wish to react in front of the children and was unsure of how to approach the teacher. I was a bundle of emotions – frustration, guilt, anger, shame – and felt complicit in the teacher's act, regardless of how well-intentioned. I didn't have anyone to tell; to whom to confess this humiliating observation and seek absolution. I stormed back into my office, afraid that a child would see the hot tears in my eyes.

APPENDIX D

Keith's Christmas Story

Well the first day coming into the school, and I had been in [the building] before because I was a literacy coach, but you know that first day, I am coming in and I was so excited... I am going to my new school, and I walk in the office and then I saw this [manger] on the cabinet when you walk in, and that was a bit of a shock. That was certainly the first bit of my teaching from the Mennonites. Coming from the [city] schools you would never have seen either a Christmas tree or a manger.

The Christmas tree... any trees become an issue in [the city] because it still signifies a Christmas tree. So back to the students in my school, I had run the statistics about how many students were of Mennonite background. But when you walk into the school I didn't really think that it was as high as what I had read in the reports until that night of the Christmas concert. Well, all the parents starting coming in, and I was going, *oh my goodness*, because they were all in their traditional dress, headcoverings and white socks, and they would smile and the students may have been in regular, western or what we think of as western dress. I never had a clue. That was a real eye opener seeing that the population was definitely higher than was visible from only seeing the students. And what was the content of the Christmas concert.

After seeing how the parents dressed, and how many came to the school compared to how many Mennonite parents I would usually see, I wasn't surprised to find that there was actual singing of *Christmas carols* and not just winter songs, or seasonal songs. It was so much more that what you could have at one of the [city] schools.



APPENDIX E

Letter of Information and Consent

Through principals' eyes: Tales of the relationship between school literacies and the literacy practices of Mennonite children

LETTER OF INFORMATION

My name is Wendy A. Crocker and I am a third year doctoral student at the Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into the relationship between school literacies and the literacy practices of conservative Mennonite children in area public schools and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

The aims of this study are to explore, through the stories of administrators, how the literacy practices of Mennonite children relate (or not) to the literacies of school. I will gather participating principals and -principals into a Professional Learning Team (PLT) that will meet several times between January and June to discuss narratives of school and examine those stories from different perspectives.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to become a member of a PLT intended to explore the literacy practices in your school and the ways in which conservative Mennonite children relate to these approaches. There will be opportunities for you to meet face to face and virtually with several other principals who also work with the Mennonite community. It is anticipated that the face to face meetings will take place in the Aylmer area, although the dates and times will be established with the group. PLT meetings will be held monthly, between January and June 2011, with each meeting lasting approximately an hour. In the fall of 2011, I will meet with those from the PLT who wish to participate for an additional, one-to-one interview to gather supplementary details about school literacy leadership and some of the specific strategies used within a school community with regard to literacy and this population. I anticipate that this interview will take approximately an hour to complete, and will be conducted at a time and location that is mutually convenient. All of the PLT meetings, and the voluntary one-

to one interviews, will be audio-taped and then transcribed into written form. You will be offered a week in which to review the written PLT meeting transcriptions, and those from your one-to-one interview if applicable, and make revisions to your contributions to ensure that I have accurately captured and represented your ideas.

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential; neither your name, nor that of your school will be used in any research presentation or dissemination of results. You will be asked to create a pseudonym by which you will be known in the research.. Following the study, the recordings, transcriptions and any related data stored electronically will be kept in a locked cabinet at my home. All data related to this study will be destroyed five years following its publication.

There are no known risks to participating in this study. Participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your academic or employment status.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Manager, Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at . . .

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Through principals' eyes: Tales of the relationship between school literacies and the literacy practices of Mennonite children

*Doctoral Study of Wendy A. Crocker, Faculty of Education
Dr. Rachel Heydon, Supervisor, Faculty of Education*

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: Wendy A. Crocker

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX F

Semi-structured interview questions

This aspect of the research will be used to examine more specifically the principals' beliefs and practices related to leadership, literacy and minoritized children.

Questions will include, but not be limited to, the following themes:

1. What contributed to your decision to become a school principal?
2. What influences how you lead your school?
3. How do the Mennonite children in your school demonstrate what they know about literacy?
4. How do you balance the needs of the learners in your school with the policy directions from the school system and Ministry?
5. How does the school support English language learning for Mennonite children?
6. What beliefs about literacy learning do these practices reflect?
7. What would you share with other school leaders about successful school literacy practices/perspectives when working with Mennonite children and their families?

APPENDIX G

School Leadership Framework

SCHOOL-LEVEL LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the exercise of influence on organizational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization's vision and goals.

Setting Directions	Building Relationships and Developing People	Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices	Improving the Instructional Program	Securing Accountability
<p>Building a shared vision</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> establish collaboration with staff, students, and other stakeholders, as well as parents and community members, to create a shared vision of the school's purpose and goals build understanding of the specific implications of the vision for the organization and the classroom communicate the vision to all stakeholders and ensure that it is understood and embraced engage staff and students in the development of the vision and ensure that it is owned and embraced communicate the vision to the community and ensure that it is understood and embraced <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate the vision to all stakeholders and ensure that it is understood and embraced engage staff and students in the development of the vision and ensure that it is owned and embraced communicate the vision to the community and ensure that it is understood and embraced 	<p>Providing support and demonstrating consideration for individual staff members</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognize the accomplishments of individual staff members build trust and respect for individual staff members' unique needs and expertise communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members 	<p>Building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> model collaboration in their own work invite staff to share ideas and expertise help develop staff and share information with staff members communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members 	<p>Staffing the instructional program</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recruit and select teachers who have the interest and capacity to further the school's vision and goals communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members <p>Providing instructional support</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members 	<p>Building staff members' sense of internal accountability</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members
<p>Setting high expectations</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members 	<p>Building productive relationships with students and among staff, students and parents</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members 	<p>Connecting the school to the wider environment</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members 	<p>Monitoring progress in student learning and school improvement</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members 	<p>Monitoring the school's performance in all areas of its operations</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members
<p>Communicating the vision and goals</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members 	<p>Aligning resources to support of the school's vision and goals</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members 	<p>Aligning resources to support of the school's vision and goals</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members 	<p>Aligning resources to support of the school's vision and goals</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members 	<p>Aligning resources to support of the school's vision and goals</p> <p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate and share information with staff members provide support and resources to staff members communicate and share information with staff members

PERSONAL LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

Leaders draw upon the personal leadership resources to effectively enact leadership practices

- Social Resources, including the ability to:
 - average consensus
 - act in an ethically appropriate way
- Psychological Resources
 - Self-efficacy
 - Resilience

- Cognitive Resources
 - Knowledge of effective school and classroom practices that directly affect student learning

APPENDIX H

School Review Checklist from Catarina's School Review

Key Factors Influencing Success – HOST SCHOOL

1. The Principal's Approach to the Staff

Notes:

2. The Principal's Preparedness (see attachment)

Notes:

3. The Principal's Follow-up Procedures

Notes:

Checklist for the School Principal

Prior to the School Visit:

- Reiterate the message that this process is about school improvement and deepening the school conversation for the PLCs by looking at gaps between the School Self-Assessment and the observations of the Review Team. It is not about teacher performance appraisal (safeguards have been established through the collaboration with the ETFO Executive).
- Inform staff and students that, during the school visitation day, the focus is on student learning (particularly Literacy). There should be no stopping to introduce visitors, no creation of special performance pieces, etc.
- Remind staff that the DRT will not be giving any individual feedback during the visit and that they should not ask for such feedback.
- Complete the school profile information and the EQAO data requested and send these with the School Self-Assessment and School Improvement Plan to the District Review Team Leader by the date requested.
- Remind teachers to have samples of student work ready in their classrooms on the day of the visitation. These should show examples of High/Middle/Low calibre student work. (This will be very helpful to the DRT - however, it is understood that the DRT may have access to all student work and may 'quietly' ask students questions for clarification without causing additional disruption to the classroom).
- Inform teachers who wish to share their day planners that they are invited to leave them open and accessible to the DRT on the visitation day.
- Encourage staff to put their concerns and/or questions forward during the pre-visit of the DRT Leader.

Requirements for the Day of the Visit:

- Ensure that there is a private room for the school team to meet.
- Provide each team member with a school map (with room number, grade and teacher clearly marked) and set of class timetables (with the components of the Literacy instruction clearly marked).
- Arrange with the Superintendent for any lunch and refreshments needed during the day.
- Ensure that evidence of school practice that might not be visible on the day of the visit is available and collected in a central spot for viewing by the team: for example:
 - School newsletters
 - A sampling of student IEPs
 - PLC agendas and minutes
 - In-service agendas and minutes
 - Principal 'walk through logs' or schedules

Notes:

Revised August 30th, 2012

APPENDIX I


Front Page of *Uta Reeka* Administrators' Primer

Uta Reeka

WELCOMING THE LOW GERMAN COMMUNITY TO SCHOOL

MAY 2011

Welcome to



Welcome to the _____ County Board of Education. _____ is the largest town in this area, other centres include _____ and its feeder school in the village of _____. There is an extensive Low German speaking community in this area of the _____ and _____ townships, and many of the children from

this culture attend the local public schools.

In _____ Tuesday is Market Day and the cars, trucks and vans share the road with the horses and buggies of the Mennonite and Amish families who are selling their produce at the Flea Market. Fresh baking home preserves and detailed handwork are complemented by beautiful carpentry and woodwork - all locally crafted by the families in the area. You will also notice the hitching posts that are sprinkled throughout town and the way that the horses wait patiently for their owners to conclude their business in town.


In our schools, you will notice that some of the

Low German speaking families continue to wear the conservative dress of the community which includes homemade dark coloured or floral print dresses for the girls and long sleeved dress shirts with collars for the boys. Girls will often wear their long hair styled in traditional buns and threaded with yarn. Boys will sometimes have hats.

Within the Low German speaking culture, the mother's primary role is as the homemaker and caregiver for the children. While it is the women that you will see most often in the schools, the father speaks for the family and all decisions are made after discussion at home.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Mennonites moved from Russia to Canada in the 1870's, establishing themselves in Manitoba and Saskatchewan
- Following WWII, their freedom from military service and their right to have their own schools ran counter to Canada's increased nationalism and 6,000 chose to move to Mexico
- Many Low German families hold Canadian citizenship through their parents and grandparents and they return to Ontario, Alberta and Manitoba in search of employment as agricultural workers.



PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT:

The administrators of the _____ family of Schools met several times during the Spring of 2011 to share ideas, resources and strategies to reach out and build relationships with the Mennonite children and their families. This document is a snapshot of what was learned including some quick reference numbers, the names of community members who are wonderful re-

sources in the Low German speaking community and a quick 'tips' sheet of proven strategies.

There are several initiatives underway beginning in the Fall of 2012 including _____ at _____ Secondary School. Patterned on the _____ Secondary School in _____, students are enrolled in language and

math courses, in addition to co-op learning.

At the elementary level, an ELD program is opening at _____ to support those needing support for English Language Learning. The shape of this program will be negotiated with the local Mennonite community to ensure both language and cultural links that are accurate and authentic for students.

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APPENDIX J

Sample of dual-language text in Plautdietsch/English



This face is shy.

8 Dit yesech es blied.

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Wendy A. Crocker

Post-secondary Education and Degrees:

Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada
1980-1982 B.PhE. With Distinction

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
1982-1983 B.Ed. Dean's Honour's List

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
1988-1993 M.Ed. (Curriculum Studies)

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2008-2013 PhD (Educational Studies)

Honours and Awards:

Province of Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS)
2009-2010 (declined); 2012-2013

Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
Doctoral Fellowship
2009-2012

Award for Outstanding Preservice Teaching
Faculty of Education
2012

University Student Council Teaching Honour Roll
Western University
2011-2012

Art Geddis, Thinking about Teaching Award
Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario
2008-2009

Larry Frase Fellowship
Phi Delta Kappa International
2008-2009

John Laughlin Award for Leadership and Staff Development
Thames Valley District School Board
2008

Related Work Experience: Public school teacher and administrator
London Board of Education/Thames Valley Board of Education
1986-2008

Research Assistant, Faculty of Education
The University of Western Ontario
2008-2011

Teaching Assistant /Instructor, Faculty of Education
The University of Western Ontario
2011-2012

Curriculum Specialist, Teaching Support Centre
The University of Western Ontario
2013

Publications:

- Crocker, W.A. (2013). "Home" schooling. In R. Buller Epp & K. Fast (Eds). *Mothering Mennonite*. (pp. 142-161) Bradford, ON: Demeter Press.
- Beynon, C., Heydon, R., O'Neill, S., Crocker, W., & Zhang, Z. (2013). Straining to hear the singing. *International Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 11(2), 176-189.
- Crocker, W.A. (In Press). More than A,B,C: Old Colony Mennonites and the challenges of Ontario public education school policy. *Transnational Social Review*.
- Heydon, R., Crocker, W., & Zhang, Z. (In Press). Novels, nests, and other provocations: Emergent curriculum production in a child care centre. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*.
- Crocker, W.A. (2011). Review of Seen and Heard: Children's rights in early childhood education, *Canadian Children*, 36(2), 51
- Crocker, W.A. (2010). Review of Chenoweth, K. (2009) How it's being done: Urgent lessons from unexpected schools, *Register* 12(1), 10
- Crocker, W.A. (2010). The teacher lounge: Work life balance – using a mental model. *Teaching Young Children*. 4(1), 30
- Crocker, W.A. (2009). Succession: Addressing administrative retirement vacancies at Thames Valley. *Register*. 11 (3), 28-31